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John Brunner

The Stone That Never Came Down



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THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN 6**

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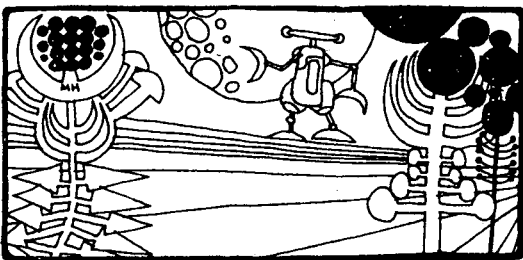
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AMAZING STORIES, Vol. 47, No. 3, October 1973, is published bi-monthly by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial office, Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. 60¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues), United States and possessions: \$3.00; Canada and Pan American Union countries: \$3.50; all other countries \$4.00. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1973 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photograph, or manuscripts.

**TED
WHITE**

EDITORIAL



THE FOREWORD YOU DIDN'T GET TO READ: Soon after I assumed the editorship of this magazine I began planning a series of (hopefully) annual volumes to be published under the collective title of *The Best from Amazing Stories*. In 1969 I put together the first volume, selecting a number of stories from the previous two decades and writing introductions to each. I assembled these with an overall foreword and the package began making the rounds of the publishing houses.

I don't want to dwell on this part of the story; it's been told before. It took two years to find a publisher (a fact which seems suspicious on the face of it, but those were times during which several important science fiction authors were still waging private vendettas against the magazines for their former reprint policies), but in 1971 Macfadden-Bartell bought both *The Best From Amazing Stories* and a companion volume, *The Best from Fantastic*. Shortly thereafter that publisher dropped its publishing activities, which were picked up in turn by Manor Books. And thus, after several years, the book was finally published in early 1973.

It is, I think, an honest collection of good stories. Here's a rundown of the actual contents: "No Charge for Alterations" by H.L. Gold, "The Augmented Agent" (published originally as "I-C-a-BeM"—a title the author did not care for) by Jack Vance, "The Misfit" by Roger Zelazny, "The Dowry of the Angyar" by Ursula K. LeGuin, "Placement Test" by Keith Laumer, "The Horn of Time the Hunter" (the magazine title was "Homo Aquaticus")

by Poul Anderson, "Phoenix" by Ted White & Marion Zimmer Bradley, and "Rogue Psi" by James H. Schmitz. The price is 95¢ and it is just barely possible that you may still find a copy buried on an obscure newsrack (I saw the book on sale in one drug store in this area).

When I finally obtained a copy I was disappointed in two aspects: the package and the absence of the foreword I had written for it. The package is functional at best: the cover is one of those paintings they turn out at carnivals by dropping blobs of different-colored paint onto a whirling turntable, but its typography is not unpleasing. The interior typography is best described as sleazy—the story introductions are set in the same size and style of type as the stories themselves, and set off from the stories only by a brief white space. It was the least-professional in appearance of any book on which my name has ever appeared.

I wrote a letter to the editor at Manor Books expressing my dismay with the book as published—and rather hoping that my dismay would be shared there. It was not. Donald A. Schrader, the editor-in-chief, replied that "I would like to point out to you that we did not use the introduction as your comments regarding *Amazing Magazine's* previous editors were not really pertinent to the book. The fact that we used the story introductions [which I had pointed out were to a degree dependent upon the missing foreword] in no way hinges on the fact that the overall introduction was or was not used."

(cont. on page 128)



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John Brunner's last appearance in these pages was with his novel, *The Wrong End of Time* (November, 1971, and January, 1972). Now he returns with a novel set only a decade in the future—a future in which the pendulum has swung grimly into repressive religion, ever-increasing inflation, massive unemployment, and . . . VC, a mysterious drug which launches—

THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN

JOHN BRUNNER

(PART ONE)

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

ASCENT

*Dissidentes Christianorum anti-
stites cum plebe discissa in
palatium intromissos, monebat
civilis, ut discordiis consopitis,
quisque nullo vetante, religioni suae
serviret intrepidus. Quod agebat
ideo obstinate ut dissensiones
augente licentia, non timeret unani-
mantem postea plebem, nullas in-
festas hominibus bestias, ut sunt
sibi ferales plerique Christianorum
expertus.*

—Ammianus Marcellinus:
Res Gestae

I

THE MORNING AFTER it went
up . . .

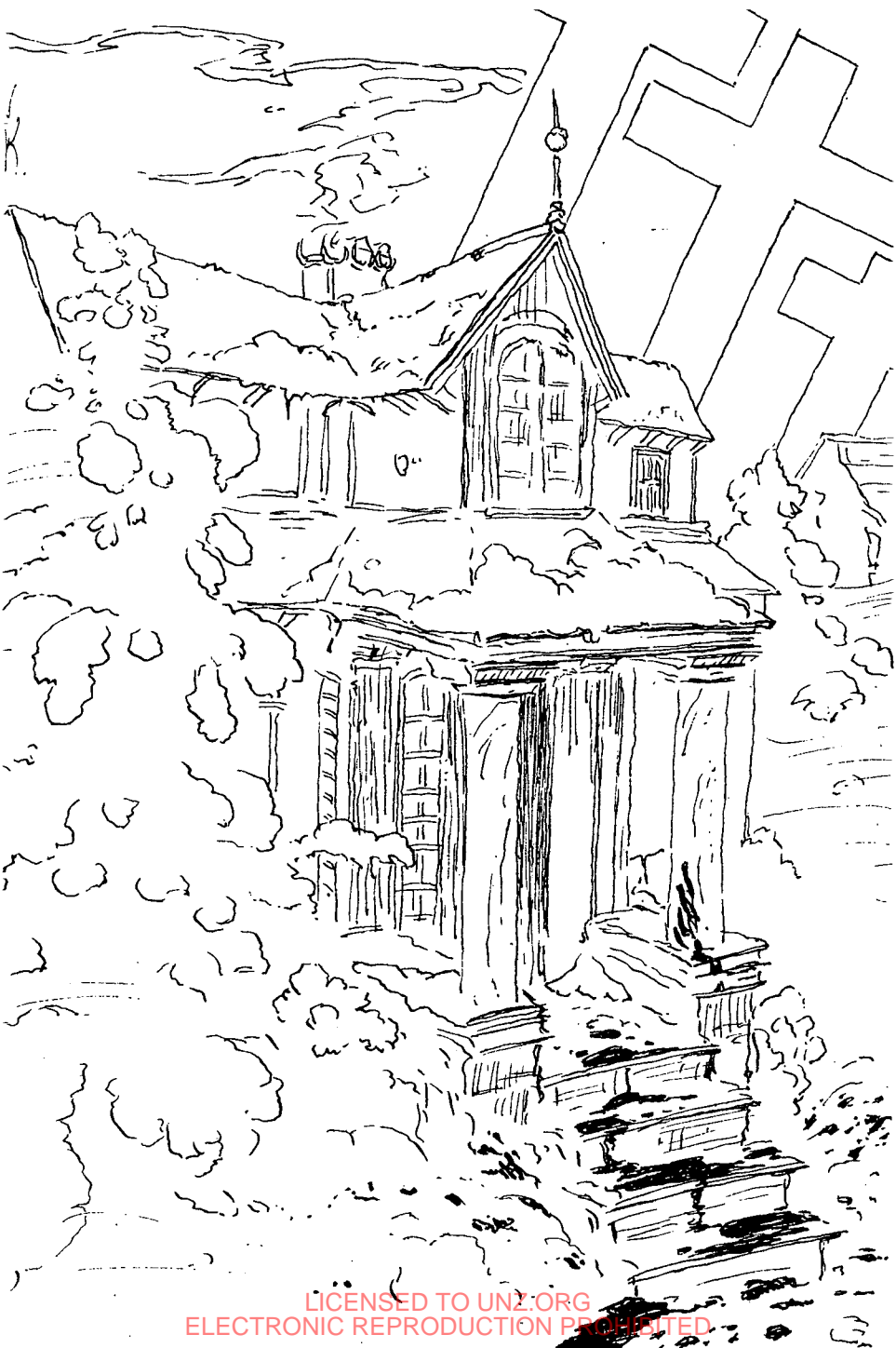
SNOW ON CHATER STREET in

London's Kentish Town. It was
such a hard winter all over Europe
that meteorologists were now confi-
dently predicting Britain's first
"white Christmas" for many years,
in the intervals of disputing
learnedly about the effect of high-
flying planes, the displacement of
jetstreams, and suchlike. In a front-
to-back ground-floor room—the
ground-floor room—at Number 25
Malcolm Fry was roused by his
bedside radio.

" . . . and found the bagpipes
playing the octopus!" There
followed a burst of synthetic-
sounding recorded laughter.

—What the hell?

Muzzily, out of the depths of the
best sleep he had enjoyed for
months.



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Then a sycophantic announcer said, "Thank you, Home Secretary, for sharing with our listeners one of your favourite jokes. Tune in at the same time tomorrow, when another distinguished sponsor of the Campaign Against Moral Pollution will prove it doesn't have to be vulgar to be funny. Remember, dirt demeans!"

—Oh. Of course. Radio Free Enterprise. We were making up parodies on the commercials last night. But I feel very strange. I feel . . . How do I feel?

The word came to him, and for a long moment he could not convince himself that it was accurate.

—Happy.

But what in the world did Malcolm Fry have to be happy about? Unemployed at thirty-five, quite likely unemployable, in his own profession at any rate; abandoned by his wife, who had taken the children and the car six months ago; head over ears in debt that every passing day of inflation worsened . . . Granted, Ruth had stayed the night, unprecedentedly, and lay cosily beside him, oblivious of the radio and the time. That alone, though, could not account for his state of mind, because the reason why she had stayed . . .

—She was right. I must have been worse than drunk. I must have been totally, absolutely out of my skull. Just as she said. I never did a crazier thing in my whole life. Taking a pill from a stranger in a pub, swallowing it on nothing more

than his say-so! It could have been poison. I think I wanted it to be poison. I know I was miserable enough.

Although in the upshot . . .

The radio played a snatch of *Land of Hope and Glory*. He stole a hand out of bedsnug to reduce the volume. It was dreadfully cold in here. Filtered by the dervishes of the snow, a street-lamp beam lanced between the curtains and showed him his breath clouding before his face. The time-switch which had brought the radio to life also controlled an electric fan-heater, but the middle element was broken and anyhow the power was usually browned-out nowadays. If only he could afford to turn on the central heating . . .

Still, it was lovely and warm in the bed, and because the clock showed only 7.52 he could spare another few minutes before he roused Ruth. Even if he didn't have a job, she did, and what was more with the Civil Service, in a department where unpunctuality counted heavily against her. She had told him she must wake at eight sharp, which was why he had set the alarm. Mostly he didn't bother. What did he have to wake up early for?

So for a while yet he could relish the memory of last night. Voicelessly moving his lips, he shaped the name Morris, the stranger, had given to what was in the pill. The capsule, to be more exact.

"VC!"

And added, "Wow."

Some time around midnight they had been debating what the initials might stand for, and after dismissing the obvious possibilities they had dissolved into helpless laughter when Ruth proposed the perfect answer: *vigorous copulation!*

—Oh, fantastic! And if what I'm feeling now is a side-effect, there ought to be more of it about!

The radio said, "And now a summary of the news. Many famous personalities in finance and show business, who thought their wealth would give them immunity to indulge their degenerate lusts, will appear in court this morning following a police raid on a house in London at two a.m.—"

Malcolm started. He almost never listened to Radio Free Enterprise, the London commercial station launched a couple of years ago—not that the BBC was much better these days—but he distinctly recalled that their news bulletins were hourly on the hour.

"The President of the World Bank," the radio said, "is flying to Rome today in a last-ditch attempt to solve the Italian financial crisis. Mobs of unemployed in Turin and Milan—"

—Load-shedding! Cuts the frequency! Of course! Bet a million clocks in London are slow this morning!

But it wasn't that which made him gasp and drive his elbow into Ruth's ribs. At the edge of hearing,

against the drone of traffic building up to the regular day-long jam on the nearby motorway—left unfinished when funds ran out, like so much else in contemporary London, so that it terminated in a monstrous bottleneck—a rhythmical sound. He recognised the pattern though he could not make out the words. Many people loudly chanting *That Old Time Religion*.

—And coming closer, too. Damn! Damn!

He scrambled out of bed, seizing a bathrobe, and rushed to the street window. Already there were more noises added to the singing: people shouting encouragement or orders to stuff the row.

"Is it time to get up, darling?" Ruth inquired sleepily. One-eyed, she peered at the clock.

"That's slow," Malcolm grunted, peering discreetly past the muslin veiling the lower half of the window: ugly, but imperative since he had taken to sleeping down here. Stage by stage he had had to rent out the house, losing first the children's bedrooms, then what had been his and Cathy's, and at last his cherished study, until this room was his actual home.

"Slow!" Ruth flung back the covers. "I'll have to run!"

He glanced at her. For a fleeting instant he relished the sight of her bare body; older than him by five years, but single and childless, she had kept her figure and could still wear the size in clothes she had taken at twenty. Moreover her face

was fascinating: not beautiful because her nose was too sharp and her mouth too big, but warranted to catch the eye of every man she passed.

And then he said, "Sorry, Ruth. Run is exactly what you dare not do."

"What? Why not?" Dressing hastily in her T-shirt-like undervest, bloomers halfway to her knees, a drab navy-blue skirt and matching shapeless jacket . . .

—Last night I said as I undressed her, "What became of colour in the world?" And she replied, "Fashion, I suppose." But that can't be right. I recall when Cathy and I first met: her girl-friends arriving for parties in mid-winter, whisking off fog-damp cloaks to reveal frocks barely more opaque than the mist outside. And in the daytime brilliant Norwegian tights that made girls' legs twinkle like a firework display . . . Now it's brown or black or grey, and worse yet thick and ugly!

Aloud: "Listen. Can't you hear them?"

She cocked her head in a manner that made an almost painfully perfect curve of her sleek dark hair, and turned pale.

"Oh, no! Godheads?"

"I'm afraid so. Since the pay-rise at Rexwell Radio last month we've been infested. Trust them to go where the pickings are fattest. And not everyone is telling them to shut up, either. I have nosey parkers for neighbours, you know. I swear they could tell my lodgers by sight before I could. If they get wind of

you, the shameless hussy who's spent the night with a married man . . . The godheads around here are worse than the average run, too. There are a lot of Irish refugees who miss the fighting they enjoyed back home, and their priests are encouraging them to join up with the ordinary godheads. It's supposed to be a way of keeping unemployed men out of trouble. I saw an idiot parson on TV the other day who made it sound as though he was sending his congregation—well, out carol-singing!"

"Finding the note that can shatter glass?" Ruth suggested with the dry wit which had been among the first things to attract him to her. He contrived a smile, but it was skeletal.

"Okay," she said eventually, fully clad now. "I have some Christmas shopping-time I haven't used, so I can risk being late for once . . . Come to think of it, most of us in the office haven't used our shopping-time. What's the point when everything is so expensive? Would it be safe for me to sneak to the bathroom?"

"Yes, of course. So long as you don't let Mary see you." Mary was one of the lodgers; she was devout, spending every evening either praying at home or attending Bible class with a girl-friend, and at weekends went home to her parents. He scarcely knew her, but she did pay regularly. "I'll make some tea."

As she stole into the hallway, he moved towards the far end of the

room. When he and Cathy chose the house, they had confidently expected this to be the next district made fashionable by the insane inflation of London house-prices, so they had created an expensive open-plan kitchen/dining/living area out of the original two ground-floor rooms. Instead, there had been a recession. The area was still mostly borderline slum, and no other house in the street had been painted for at least five years.

—An ideal target for godheads, regardless of anything else . . .

But his mood of euphoria, for the time being, was proof against anything.

—So what if I did act crazy yesterday? The whole damned world is going off its rocker. TV news last night: half the blacks in America seem to have declared civil war, half the Georgians in Russia have decided on UDI and they smuggled that film of Tbilisi in flames to the West to prove it. The planet's cracking like the shell of a hard-boiled egg under the hammering of riots, insurgency, brushfire war . . . And these idiots here, our "beloved leaders"! Content to waste two million of the best-trained workers in the world, to let them stay out of work for months on end, when anyone with a grain of sense can see we *need* them because this city's practically collapsing around our ears!

He set the kettle to boil. From overhead came the noise of creaking boards. That was the American, Billy Cohen, preparing

to leave for work. Billy was the nicest of his lodgers, far nicer than Mary, or the colourless student Reggie, or Len the middle-aged clerk embittered by divorce ten years ago, ever willing to complain about his wife to anybody who would listen. Billy had a job—lucky devil—at a bookstore in Hampstead. Six foot two tall and solidly built, he always made the floor complain when he strode across it.

And here was Ruth back again, hastily, like a thief. Saying as she closed the door, "Malcolm, do they—well, do they know who you are?"

"How could they help knowing? My picture was plastered all over the papers, wasn't it? And I'm still a grand scandal in the district—me, the teacher who corrupted innocent kids! So I always have to buy them off, and they're never satisfied with less than a fiver. I can't afford it, but I could even less well afford to have them work the house over. If somebody from my mortgage company found they'd wrecked the place, I'd be done for. Homeless as well as jobless."

Warming the pot, measuring out the tea, he improvised words to fit the distant chanting—not so distant, now; the godhead gang must be almost at the corner of the street.

"Oh, it's good to screw your sister—sorry, I'm a trifle manic this morning—it was good for Cain and Abel, so it's good enough for me! And it's good to screw your

daughter, yes it's good to screw your daughter, it was good for Papa Lot and so . . ."

The words trailed away as he glanced up and found her grinning at him.

"Know something?" she said. "About last night?"

"What?"

"It was never so good for me before. Not with anybody. It was as though you'd climbed inside my head and knew what I wanted done next before I'd thought of it myself."

"I'm glad," he said. "It was fantastic for me as well. Thank you."

There was a momentary pause. Then, with a shrug, he moved towards the door.

"They're coming," he said. "Four of them. I'd better answer right away, or they'll smash a window or two . . . No, wait a second." He checked, reaching for the handle. "I can hear Billy coming down. He has a job and I don't. Let him deal with them for once!"

He turned back to finish making the tea.

"Malcolm!" Ruth said suddenly.

"Yes?"

"Malcolm, there's thick snow on the ground out there. It's still falling."

"So?" He was filling the pot in a cloud of steam.

"How the hell do you know there are four godheads on the way? They aren't singing that I can hear—if they're there at all!"

On the point of bringing milk from the refrigerator, Malcolm froze and stared at her.

"That's right! I . . . I don't know. But I'm absolutely certain. I can even tell that there's one fat and one thin and— Oh, no! The bloody fool!"

"What is it?"

"Billy! He's arguing with them!"

"I don't hear—" Ruth began, but he had rushed past her and out into the hallway.

There as predicted was Billy in his shabby red mackinaw confronting exactly four godheads: all carrying their typical yard-high crosses made of plastic designed to imitate wood with the bark on, all better dressed than he was, in well-tailored coats, fur hats, fur-lined boots. Godheads, it was estimated, had turned begging—or as they termed it, alms-collection—into a multi-million pound industry these last few years.

And Billy was saying to their leader, a brown-haired brown-eyed man nearly as tall as himself, "Christians, are you?"

The leader took a half-pace back on the snow-slippery step. He said resentfully, "We weren't told this had become a Jewish household!"

—Given Billy's archetypal appearance, hook nose, swarthy complexion and the rest, that's a reasonable assumption.

But Billy's response was a snort.

"See any mezuzahs on the doorpost, do you? Not that you'd know what the word means! Well, I tell you what!" He dug in the

pocket of his jacket and produced a ten-pound note. The eyes of all the godheads bulbed eagerly.

"I'll give you this!" Billy barked. "Provided you can answer me a simple question!"

"Billy!" Malcolm called from the door of his room. "It's okay—leave it. I'll give 'em something."

"What? Oh, morning, Mal. No, this is my treat today! I just want a simple question answered, like I say!" He faced the godheads again.

"You can have this if you name a weapon of modern war that wasn't invented and first used by a Christian country!"

"Oh, no!" Malcolm heard Ruth breathe at his side.

"Come on, come on!" Billy rasped. "Don't bother going back to gunpowder. I know the Chinese got at that first. But I also know you lot were so eager to steal the credit that if you were German you were taught it was invented by *Friar* Berthold Schwartz and if you were English that it was invented by *Friar* Roger Bacon—good churchmen both! *Well?*"

"Billy!" Malcolm advanced into the hallway, careless of how cruel its ice-cold tiles were to his unshod feet.

Baring his teeth, Billy ignored him and stuffed his money back in his pocket.

"Can't answer me, hm? Not surprising! The whole lot is yours, from the hand-grenade to the hydrogen bomb! So stop wasting my time. I have to go to work. And it wouldn't do you any harm to work

for a change, instead of sponging off the rest of us who do!"

Roughly he shouldered the leader of the godheads aside.

That was a mistake.

The man lost his footing on the steps and with a yell went sprawling down to street-level, upon which his companions retaliated.

Their crosses made admirable clubs.

II

"GOOD MORNING, MILADY," said Tarquin Drew. "I trust you have heard the good news on the radio?"

"I have indeed, Tarquin," answered Amelia, Lady Washgrave, as she entered her breakfast-room. Snow lay thick on the lawn beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows, but within the air was warm and deliciously scented with Earl Grey tea.

Tarquin was her personal secretary, and she had conceived a considerable affection for him. His father, incredibly, was an uncouth charge-hand in a factory, and salted his conversation with appalling objurgations. Tarquin had managed to live all that down. Granted, some breath of scandal had attached to him at university . . . but "there is more joy in heaven."

Deftly he aided her chair to adopt its correct posture beneath her decently long skirt. She was a perfect model of what, in her view, a respectable widow of forty-eight should look like. It had been at the

age she herself had now attained that the late Sir George had succumbed to a heart attack precipitated, no doubt, by excessive dedication to his business interests. She had borne the loss with fortitude, perhaps not unmingled with relief.

"Would you prefer *The Times* or your correspondence first, milady?" Tarquin inquired, turning to the sideboard. And added in a regretful tone, "I'm afraid the newspaper has not accorded the same prominence to the police's raid as did Radio Free Enterprise."

He displayed the headlines to prove his point; they concerned strikers in Glasgow, riots in Italy, and suchlike trivia. Lady Washgrave was unsurprised; it was notorious that the media, including even the august *Times*, were mouthpieces for the international conspiracy of corruption. She waved the paper aside and accepted an inch-thick wad of letters, most of which, she noted with approval, were from local chapters of the Campaign Against Moral Pollution—of which she was Executive Chairman—and bore the campaign's symbol: a cross-hilted dagger spiking a stylised book, intended to represent morality cleansing the world of trash.

These at least could be trusted to inform her of *important* matters.

"There were also a hundred and eighty Christmas cards," murmured Tarquin. "And—ah—some abusive items which I took the liberty of extracting. For the

police."

Lady Washgrave nodded absently, setting aside the topmost letter because, alas, it could not be relied on to generate action. It was a complaint about the theory of evolution being taught "as though it were a proven fact." The second was a different matter, and ought to cost a teacher, perhaps some school governors and very possibly some local councillors their jobs. To think that a woman living openly in sin should be put in charge of hapless infants!

"Mark that one 'urgent'!" she directed. And, on the point of turning to the next, a description of the behaviour of courting couples on a Gloucestershire common, she checked.

"Is there no communication from Brother Bradshaw?"

"No, milady, I'm afraid there isn't."

"How strange!" She drew her brows together. "The Reverend Mr Gebhart assured me that by today at latest we should be told whether he can join our New Year's Crusade. Admittedly he's greatly in demand, but even so . . . Not that I myself entirely approve of the 'hard sell' approach, you know, but my committee did vote in favour of inviting him, and one must abide by the democratic principle, must one not?"

"I'll attempt to telephone him later," Tarquin promised.

"Yes, please do." And, having taken a bite of the toast which was all she ever ate in the morning,

Lady Washgrave sighed, gazing at the snow-covered lawn. "How beautiful it looks!" she murmured. "So—so pure . . . Which reminds me: you did, I trust, instruct the gardeners to drain the pipe leading to the swimming-pool?"

"Of course, milady. A little more tea?"

DETECTIVE CHIEF INSPECTOR David Sawyer composed a signature block at the bottom of his report and rolled it out of the typewriter. It had been a long report. It had been a long job.

"And completely bloody useless," he said.

On the other side of the office Sergeant Brian Epton glanced up from the charge-sheets he was compiling. "What's useless, chief?" he demanded.

"This whole night's work!"

"I wouldn't say that," Epton countered. "Eighteen arrests, and some of them people who make news by catching cold . . . It's going to look good on the crime-sheet, isn't it?"

"Oh, I admit that," Sawyer grunted, rising and crossing the office to look out of the window. In the yard beyond was a car with a dented wing. Yesterday evening it had been driven into a protest meeting of unemployed Italian immigrant workers, and a man had been sent to hospital with two legs broken. Snow was sifting down, fine as sugar from a dredger. A shivering constable was holding a plastic sheet as a kind of awning

over the head of one of the forensic people while he examined the damage to the car.

—Another pin for the map . . .

His eyes strayed to the wall where a visual record was kept of unsolved crimes of violence, big red, black or yellow pins marking the spot where the incident occurred.

Every day there seemed to be more of them. More often than not there actually were.

—And what was I doing all night? Spoiling someone's party, that's what.

Aloud, though, as he unhooked his coat from the stand by the door, he merely said to Epton, "See you this evening, then."

"Yes, of-course."

HIGH ABOVE LAMBETH in his council flat, Harry Bott was woken by the sound of his children shouting in the adjacent kitchen, and his wife Vera desperately ordering them to shut up. Blearily he peered at the luminous Jesus clock beside the bed. It was just past nine, and he'd intended to lie in late today. He hadn't come home until after three a.m., having spent long cold hours sitting in his car. It had not yet started to snow, but through the cloudless sky the heat of the land was being broadcast to the stars.

Still, it had all been worth it. Now he knew exactly how he was going to carry out the job he'd been planning for so long.

—Not this week, though. Not before Christmas. Directly after

would be best, when trade's at its slackest. Anyway, I'll need help. Someone to drive, someone to stand lookout, someone to carry heavy crates.

And with the scheme he had lined up, he could rely on recruiting the best talent in the manor.

His good humour drove away his automatic intention to yell at the kids. Here in a high-rise block, when the lifts were so often out of order, where else was there for them to play when the weather was this bad except at home?

—Of course their cousins . . .

But he was in too good a mood even to feel his regular pang of jealousy at the luxury his brother-in-law—Vera's brother—wallowed in, with his big house in Hampstead Garden Suburb and his two cars and the rest of it. A tickle or two like the one he was currently planning, and he might be on the way to similar prosperity.

Humming, he pulled on a dressing-gown and padded into the kitchen in search of a cup of tea.

"Here's your dad!" Vera exclaimed. "Now you're for it!"

Except for the baby, yelling in his crib, the children fell silent, round-eyed, and she turned from her ironing-board to confront him with tear-stains on her once-pretty face.

"I did try and keep 'em quiet, Harry, honest I did! It's just that I feel so low. I don't have any energy these days." She put her hand on her belly, where three months of pregnancy were just beginning to bulge her cotton overall, and

glanced at the picture of the Virgin in its place of honour as though in search of sympathy from another mother. "You know it was like this last time a baby was on the way, and the doctor did say I shouldn't—"

"None of that dirty talk in front of the children!" Harry roared.

THE FIRST TIME the doorbell rang, Valentine Crawford failed to hear it. For one thing, he was trying to fix his baulky oil-heater. On being lit this morning it had uttered foul-smelling smoke, and he had had to let it cool down, take it to bits, and clean the charred wick. Actually he needed a new one, but he couldn't afford it.

And for another thing, he had the radio on. It was all he could offer Toussaint to keep him amused. He had had to turn in the TV last time the rental payments went up.

—Kind of ironical, I guess. Me, a trained TV repairman, and I don't have a set of my own!

But he was out of work, of course. Had been since that horrible, incredible day when the boss had called him in and told him bluntly that he'd have to leave because too many women clients of the firm, on their own during the day, objected to having a black man enter their homes.

—As though I could rape them! Me, a scrawny runt of five foot four! Hell, I couldn't screw them buckra bitches without they help me, start to finish!

He'd tried to lodge a complaint

under the Race Relations Act, but nobody was paying much attention to that any more.

The radio was saying, "According to informed sources the Chief Constable of Glasgow will appeal for the assistance of troops if yesterday's order by the Industrial Relations Court is not obeyed. Now in its ninth week, the strike at—"

Which was not calculated to amuse a six-year-old kid. He wound the knob around in search of music or a comedy show. Meantime the third thing which had prevented him from hearing the bell continued from the bedroom next door, a series of horrible racking coughs.

—If I knew where that she-devil was, I'd . . . !

But he couldn't think of anything bad enough to do to her, the wife who had walked out on him when she grew sick of being mocked and taunted every time she went to the shops with Toussaint.

—Moral, never marry an English girl, not even if you were born on the next street from her home. It oughtn't to make any difference. Hell, I married her because she was pretty and fun to be with and wasn't all made of wood from the waist down like half the English girls. Right from the next damned *street*! But she turned out the same as the rest in the end.

This time the oil-heater lit cleanly and burned with a nice blue flame.

"Okay, son!" he shouted. "It'll be warmer in a minute!"

Whereupon the bell rang a second time, and he answered cautiously, not really expecting that bastard, the local School Attendance Officer, who had been persecuting him these past few weeks because even with a doctor's certificate he didn't believe Toussaint was too sick to go out, and found Cissy Jones, bright and plump and sixteen and thoughtful, who had brought a bottle of a special cough-mixture her aunt said was very good and should be tried on Toussaint. He liked her, and even before she had measured out a spoonful of the medicine for him he had quietened, as though some of the time he were forcing himself to cough to attract attention.

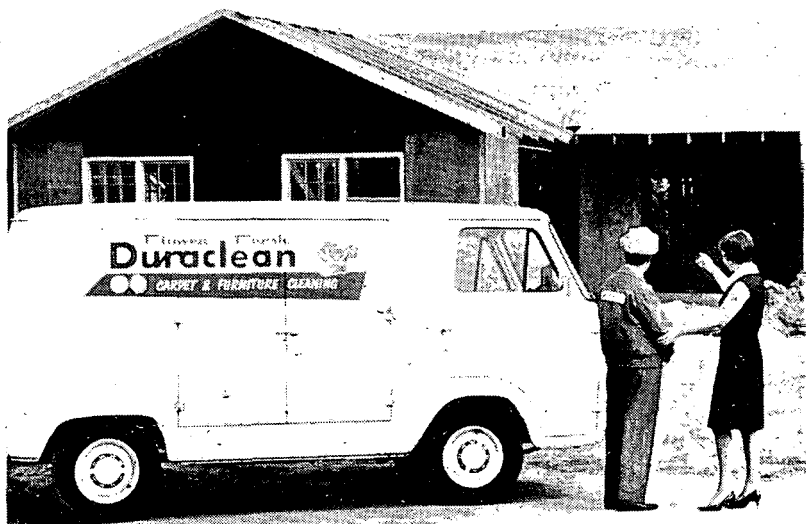
—But he looks so peaky and he shakes so much . . .

The bell rang again, and here came the rest of them, the rest of the brothers and sisters for whom he ran an informal class in what the authorities at buckra schools didn't want them to find out. A couple of them were playing truant, being not yet past the official leaving-age of fifteen. Some would have liked to stay on at school in spite of all, but hadn't been allowed to. These days it was a common habit to pass over a black kid who talked back to the teachers, and slap on his record a rubber stamp saying *INEDUCABLE*. And half of them were glad to be out of school, but furious at being out of work as well. Altogether there were ten today.

Five minutes' socialising, and he called for order. From a stack on

(cont. on page 57)

Your Dreams Can with your own



***Hundreds of men—previously working for salaries or wages
now enjoy greatly increased incomes, personal independence
and secure futures as owners of their own businesses
under the Duraclean Franchise***

Unthinking men may tell you that the day is past when an individual can build a successful business of his own. The fact is that Franchising has opened a wonderful new world of opportunity for such men. The "mama and papa" grocery store, and the corner druggist have succumbed to the gigantic chains. But, in their place an exciting new kind of business abounds with big profit opportunities for the individual.

For twenty years the "service industry" has been growing with fantastic speed. Let the chains have the retail store business. Even a small business providing an unusual service can bring profits to the individual that were unheard of in the old days. And, unlike the chains, the service business today, is thriving under Franchising.

What is the difference? Just this: A chain is a large number of stores in a chain all operating under the same plan; under the

same well-known name; *but* are owned by one corporation. In Franchising, the individual uses tested and proven plans for starting his business and building it; he operates under a Nationally Advertised and well-known name, he has step by step guidance *but he owns the business*. He enjoys the advantages of chain recognition, but he keeps all the net profits for himself.

The Duraclean Franchise is such a business. No store to rent. No fixtures to buy. No inventory or stock of goods to pay for. No office or work-room required. And, no special education or experience is needed for success. Men of almost every educational level have made glowing successes with the "know-how" furnished by our Company. They've worked from their homes as all Duraclean Service is given on the premises of the customer. In the beginning they've used the family car as all equipment can be carried in the trunk. Their only investment has been a

Become a Reality Duraclean Franchise



Dreams of others have come true

"For the first time in 20 years, I've got security—without fear of losing my factory job."

H.E., Ohio

"Duraclean is one of the least expensive businesses to get started, but has a greater potential than any other."

R.H.R., Alaska

"I have accomplished more with Duraclean in the past 5 years than in the 17 years I was working in the shop."

J.W., Pa.

cash outlay of a little more than \$1000.

What is Duraclean Service. It is a modern method of cleaning and reviving color and resilience of carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture and auto interiors—a method that has almost unbelievable superiority over the old way of harsh scrubbing with water, strong detergents, and power driven brushes. Tests made by an independent laboratory show that the Duraclean "Absorption Method" removes twice as much dirt and soil removed by machine scrubbing. And, the carpets and upholstery are dry and ready to use a few hours after cleaning. In addition to cleaning and reviving, you have six other equally superior services to increase profits. The improved Duraclean process has proved so superior that Duraclean Services are now available through a world wide organization.

Who are the customers? The finest homes in your community. Yes. But of equal

importance hotels, motels, schools, shops, stores, offices, theaters, hospitals, and institutions. The commercial business is big and because much of this work can be done evenings or Saturdays, many men have started in spare time without giving up their jobs or pay checks. When they have seen from actual experience that Duraclean could pay them many times their former salaries, they have resigned the old job and become independent businessmen—with all the added respect and standing that a businessman has in his community.

If you've ever had a really strong desire to "some day own your own business" the Duraclean Franchise is well worth investigating. We have no salesmen to try to influence you. The entire Duraclean Opportunity is explained in detail in a 24-page book. This book will be mailed free to any man sincerely interested in a future of security and independence. Just your name and address is all that's needed. Send it today. After reading all the facts, if you decide to take the next step, you can write again and let us know.

We'll help you with financing, with training, with equipment, and with all our years of experience in showing other men how to make their dreams become realities. To investigate costs nothing and does not place you under the slightest obligation. Is this something you should do for yourself? Today?

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WITHOUT OBLIGATION send me the free booklet which shows me how I can start a Duraclean business in my spare time without risking my job. No salesman is to call.

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When we published Rotsler's "There's A Special Kind Needed Out There" (July, 1972), we were hardly prepared for the enthusiasm that story generated—it would appear that Bill struck a responsive vein. Now he returns with another story about a "spacer"—but this one has a different set of problems. He has to deal with—

THE GODS OF ZAR

WILLIAM ROTSLER

Illustrated by JOE STATON

DECIDING TO BECOME A GOD is not all that easy. I have to think about it a lot first. Oh, I can see there will be a lot of fun involved, what with the way they have their religion set up. As a god, of course, I could change some things around. Virgins are okay, but sometimes a girl with some experience can really be a lot more fun.

On the other hand there is a lot of ritual I'd have to sit through and be certain to make the right responses and all. And those priests are a grim lot to deal with.

But as a god you don't much have to worry about making too many mistakes, once you've caught on a little. I mean, if you're a *god* you aren't going to get too much back-talk and anything that you do that's out of line would be *divine mystery*, the old "god works in mysterious ways" line.

But I'm not really first rate god material and I'm the first to know

it. I'm just a pretty ordinary spacer with ordinary spacer skills, no matter how extraordinary they might be to mudballers, especially primitive ones.

I have had the usual longevity treatments and I could outlive all the citizens of this priest-city and probably their children's children, as well. If they let me live.

They don't know about my long-life treatments, naturally, and it's a factor to consider. It could enhance my god rep as the years go by but it could cause trouble, too, and maybe resentment. I'm mortal as hell and if one of those mudballers sticks a spear in me I'll bleed. Power figures have a tendency to fall ker-plunk and I don't want to be one of them.

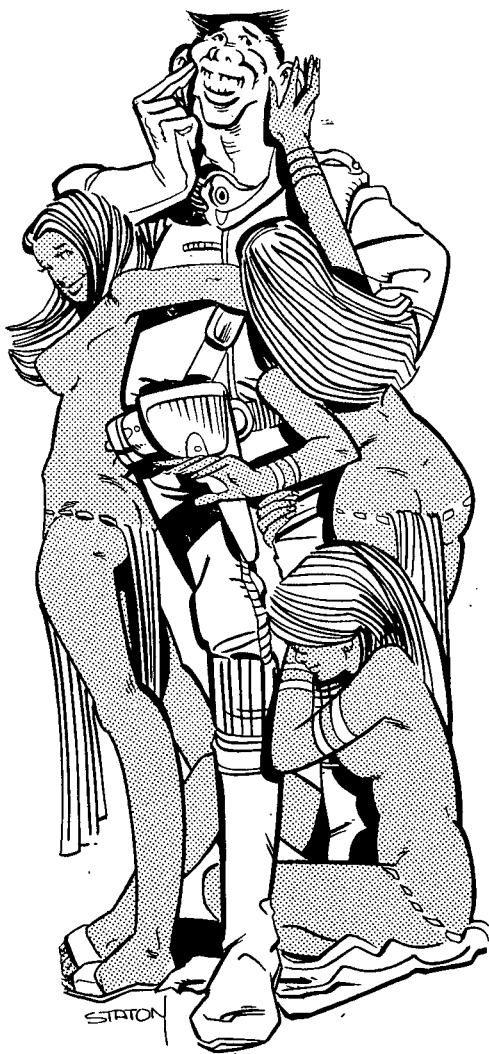
If I decline their offer of godship I *could* just skip out, I suppose. I don't have an Anthropoder with me to give the point difference between humans and the people on Zar but

it has to be fractional. I just looked once at one of those olive-skinned wenches that old Kor called Zembians and I *know* we're going to get along just fine. So if I did skip out I might go somewhere for twenty or thirty years and either they'll forget me or forget what I look like. I could probably pass anywhere on this mudball without much trouble, except I would always have to be a stranger from a far land.

But do I want to?

That's where the trouble is. I can't make up my mind. If I go wandering around I *could* violate some tabu and get my zorbs cut off or get tossed into some lice-infected cell for life—and that's a *long* time—or get put permanently out of the way. But if I stay here and say "Why, yes, I am a god—how perceptive of you to notice it" I'll be taken care of, fed, adored, venerated and have first pick at those weekly sacrifices of young females. But on the other hand, I won't see much of the country. Gods pretty much stick around close to the parish, at least that's the feeling I get from Kor and whatshisname, that skinny mean one, Klandor.

But I may be on this mudball the rest of my life. The "*Odysseus III*" was at least two sectors off the dotted line when the converters blew. Manning just *had* to stop off at Siva IV and getting back up to light took us forever. Since we were so far off course Manning didn't want us to signal distress when the



trouble started. So we limped along, hoping to get those bastards fixed or at least get close enough to Projected Flight Course to send out a signal. But those frelkers couldn't take it and there we were, scrambling to get into the boats before the radiation level got too high.

I don't know where Manning and Benford went, probably somewhere in this system, maybe even here on Zarkan. If we find each other okay, but if we don't that's okay, too. I'm not feeling too kindly towards Manning right now and I never did care much for Benford ever since he was Number Two on the old *Comte de Mirabeau*.

So here I am, lying on a big couch in the god chambers, dictating this into one of the few things I salvaged out of the lifeboat when it crashed. That goddamned gravity indicator must have been frelked up and misread Zarkan because I hit with one hell of a bump. If anyone back at Jupiter Paralight Freight ever hears this, you frelking mongos had better start giving better maintenance or I'm making a complaint to the Union!

Kor and that whole crowd are out there just waiting and I'm in here wondering how I got into all this. Naturally I had been glad when I saw the griff shepherds were humanoid and just as naturally when they started boiling out of the city gates and coming at me with spears I blasted them.

Now I don't want you freems back there at Central to start

screaming about proper procedures in contacting alien races being violated. You get a hundred or so rough looking aliens coming at you with blood in their eye and see how far your First Contact manuals take you.

As it happened it worked out just fine. I disincorporated about seven of them—a lucky number here, just like a lot of mudballs—and the rest grumbled to a halt. They were still bent on blood-letting *my* blood but now they were trying to get some one else to do it, not *them*. That gave me the opportunity to make a speech, disincorporate a nearby rock and a faraway tree. They ran back aways to the city gate and by the time I got there the whole city police force was thumping down the cobblestones.

I looked mild and peaceful and disintegrated a watchtower when I saw some sort of emperor-sized crossbow being swung my direction. I turned the beam to fan and knocked down a flight of birds in full sight of Kor, who was there to exorcize me. I think it was that more than the disappearing watchtower that got Kor on my side. Seemed I fulfilled some sort of prophecy. Watchtowers had been knocked down before, though never quite so quickly, but flights of krelli had plunked down like that never.

He had some time convincing the police chief that I must be a god or at the very least a messenger from the gods. The chief—Commander of the Zarkan Horde in Executive City is the way I translate his real

title, but he's really a cop—wanted to spear me a little and discuss godhood later. But the holy man pulled rank on the soldier, probably threatening him with excommunication or divine frowns or something, and I was brought into the city with full honors.

I'm no country boy, so I kept my hand on my gun and eyes in the back of my head, sticking close to Kor. I've been to Ts'ai-shen and Tahmuras and Churchill IV and came off with nothing worse than a knife cut on the forearm. I spent a week on Grennell's Planet and a month on Heimdall, where they worship the dead and try to get you as honored as all hell. I lived through all of those spots and a couple score more in a fifty light year cone out from Sol towards Sirius. And I didn't do it by being stupid.

I knew damn well I might have to spend the rest of my days on this mudball and I figured it might just be better as one of the topdogs than as a slave. I didn't know then they had godhood in mind for me.

I used my senses all the way to the temple. The place stank, but no worse than Eklund, and that's considered the garden city of Raeburn's World. A lot of unfamiliar smells, plus a lot of neomint. The sounds were the usual ones of bronze-age cultures—smiths, caged birds, whores, horses (or what passed for horses here), drunks, flutes, something that sounded like a bagpipe in heat, cymbals, a few gongs, trickling

water, laughter, a few screams. The usual.

The city was stone and mud, wattle and inlaid pretties. The people were olive-skinned, ranging from almost black to suntan fair. No blondes, which may be one of the factors in my favor. There seemed to be a few taboos, like not getting in the way of a priest. There certainly didn't seem to be any nudity taboos because I got my eyefull of bare olive breasts and buttocks and more than one looked back the same way.

Then we moved into the "better part of town" where the merchants lived, with big guarded warehouses behind. Then on to the royal part, with rather lush interiors hidden behind very plain and fortress-like exteriors. I got plenty of looks through windows opened so that people could stare out at the foreigner.

Then the temple. I thought it was the king's palace at first, except the guards were armed priests and my warrior escort stayed outside. It crossed my mind that I might be set up for a sacrifice, so I took out my gun and held it casually in my hand. Kor glanced at it nervously, probably thinking of it as a god's lightning bolt quiver. But I must give him credit, he just kept stalking along.

We collected Klandor outside the entrance to the big throne room. I taped him as Number Two Priest right off. He didn't know what was happening but he deferred to Kor and eyed me suspiciously. I was

with Kor; anyone who can see godhood in me at thirty yards is okay.

The throne room was, well, *lush*. There was this huge anthromorphic god statue at one end and a big throne in front that was wide enough to lie down on. About three thousand years of gifts to the gods had encrusted the whole thing in jewels, some of them as big as bird's eggs. There were a lot of diamonds and rubies and somewhat pale emeralds but the ones that lighted up my panels were the fat round ones like star sapphires but with little nova-like things inside.

They made a big thing out of prostrating themselves before the throne and the statue and I saw them eyeing me as I just stood there looking around. To them that took a lot of guts, I guess, but to me I wasn't bowing to no forty-foot chunk of rock, no matter how many king's ransoms were strung around his neck like beads.

Kor seemed very proud of me after that and whathisname, Klandor, was even darker and more grumpy than ever. There was a lot of talk between them that seemed to go on forever. I wandered over and eyeballed the jewels awhile, then I just sat down on the throne. Don't ask me why.

Right off I knew I had made a mistake. Everything stopped dead. There was some gasping from behind the pillars in the darkness where a lot of priests were gathered. Kor just looked at me. Klandor almost died.

I don't know what made me do that, but I was dead tired and there were no other seats anywhere. And if that damn thing had looked like a throne instead of a big sofa made out of rock I probably wouldn't have sat in it. I'd been crowded into that damn lifeboat for nineteen days and I was just plain exhausted. I wanted to sit down, that's all.

Well, Klandor didn't take to it at all. He started towards me. Now I knew I was in trouble but the best way to really get the frelk into the system is to act like you're scared. So I just kept a straight face and raised the gun.

The trouble was Klandor didn't know it was a gun. But Kor did. I saw him smile and right then I figured Klandor was a thorn in his side and divine justice was about to be served. But I wasn't about to eliminate factors until I knew what was happened.

So I blew a chunk of the floor out and it knocked Klandor down. It also started a panic. It left just Kor and me looking at each other and Klandor, all bloody and wide-eyed, crumpled up, afraid to move.

I think right then Kor's estimate of me went up and I smiled faintly and waved Klandor out. Kor snapped at him and in a few seconds there was just the two of us. He started talking, being very respectful, but insistent. I didn't know what he was saying but I caught the mood. "You and I, baby," was the theme. "You and I can rule the world!"

Well, who am I to turn down a world?

After a bit, when he understood that I was tired (I was slumped down looking at him through half-closed eyes) he called in some slave-girls to take me away and give me a bath. The sight of those young and voluptuous girls, dressed only in sandals and a few beads, woke me up some and I smiled at Kor.

"You guys know how to live!" I told him. I let them lead me away to what was probably Kor's quarters. I undressed but I kept my blaster within reach at all times and let the girls bathe me in this big marble tub. They got right in there and from their ministrations—once they got over being scared—I knew old Kor had really trained them fine. There are few sensations like being pampered outrageously by six beautiful nude girls.

I graciously bestowed my lordly attentions on the one I thought the most beautiful and when it was over she was really getting a big head about it and the others were jealously subservient to her. But by that time I was almost in bye-bye land.

I rolled over on top of my gun and the world went away. Kor might have come in and knifed me in my sleep but I had to go to sleep sometime and I might as well start now. Tomorrow was another lifetime.

My "favorite" from the night before woke me up in one of the most delicious ways a man could be

awakened and after that was over in came breakfast. I suspect there must have been peepholes because their timing was excellent. And right after them came Kor.

He was polite, talked a lot, and wanted something. I had to figure out a way to communicate in a hurry and learning the language would take time to get even to a pigeon-talk stage.

My eyes lit on some parchment sheets and I got up out of bed reluctantly. There's something *grand* about brushing away the clutching hands of a beautiful, nude, and adoring girl. I found what looked like a pen and a bottle of dark red ink. I started drawing.

Kor looked over my shoulder as I drew. I borrowed an idea from the Egyptians and made me much bigger than anyone else. I made Kor about a third my size and all the rest the "standard" size. I still wasn't throwing my crown in the ring for godship, I just meant to impress him with what a big man had come to his one-hobbit planet. I drew stars and my ship and pointed at the sky and me and all the stuff you'd expect. Kor pointed and I drew and we pointed at various things and pretty soon I was communicating.

It was then I found out I was a god-candidate.

It's a strange feeling, having someone—anyone—think you might be a god. It makes you think, not just about yourself and your worthiness, but about those other

entities that have been called gods . . . or anti-gods, for that matter. Gods and devils. "My god is the only god so *your* god must be a devil!"

I still didn't know what other forces might be working about this planet and I was not eager to be a god if it turned out there was some chance that my cult was some about-to-be-stamped out group of dissenters from the Great God Gorp. I asked about other gods (I drew figures outlined by dotted lines that were my size) which seemed to startle, anger and puzzle Kor. Nope, I was the only god around. I still wasn't convinced. I mean, if you were standing next to a god would you be likely to say there was any *real* competition around? Especially if your job depended upon that godling.

I pantomimed that I had to think about it. I discovered a surprising inadequacy in acting ability on my part. I had always thought I had gotten along okay, but then I had usually been speaking Univers or maybe Terran English. It just took a little longer but Kor got my point and went away.

And the girls came back.

My "favorite" went into a real blue funk when I chose another girl, but shrugged philosophically and endured the jibes of the other girls. I felt better and managed to elevate three girls to special status before the sunset came and Kor came back.

I wasn't too eager for his gloomy face to appear. It struck me odd

that he had such a gloomy face when his household held such lovelies, but there are some that just can't get with it no matter what.

He faced my glower with a certain amount of bravery, but then maybe my godhood was for others and not him. He and I had to communicate more intimately than my improvised comic strips had permitted us.

We spent most of the evening, all the next day and the day after that doing a grade school lesson in learning each other's language. He couldn't help learning a little of my Univers, or "god-words" as he dubbed them. It was hard going, much on the level of "See Kor. See Kor walk. See Klandor fall down. Kor is good priest." Things like that.

I kept my gun handy, just in case. There was going to be no sudden god-demotion around this place!

Kor kept the other priests away and kept a steady supply of new wenches coming in to bathe and please me. It was the women that gave the clincher to their 100% human status. Women are women the galaxy over, whether they are called girls, drells, mumalbas, broads, zambians, wells-of-passion, *j'artas* or femali.

He only bothered me once. I had to go out on a balcony and be seen. I noticed he kept himself allied to me by his closeness and at his prodding I incinerated another flight of kreli. This had its usual effect and a great sigh went up from several thousand Zarkans down there in the temple square. It made me a lit-

tle nervous. There were a *lot* of them down there and only one of me. The 122 charges left in my gun were not too much of a comfort.

I was going to have to get something going besides my gun-culture. But the Zarkans were too advanced to be much impressed by a pocket multi-tool and the small radio I had didn't have anyone else around to make mysterious words come out of the air. I had to get back to the wrecked shell of the life-boat and see if there was anything there I could use.

I tried to walk out the next morning, early, slipping out from under Zora and Mumtabba, but two guard priests went running off to Kor and I wasn't to the city gate when there was Kor, breathing hard, with his robe awry, looking both angry and hurt.

Was I leaving? Was I angry with Kor? Was I angry with the Zarkans? Was there a sacrifice I'd like? Could Kor go with me wherever I was going?

I didn't want to lead them back to the ship so I looked sternly at Kor and walked impressively out through the gates and right up to a big oak-like tree on a nearby knoll. I motioned the others back, then stood looking at the tree. I don't know what they thought I was doing, praying I suppose, but I was thinking. How the hell was I going to get free long enough to gut the ship of anything I'd need? Kor was pressing me now to admit to god-ship and step-up in the world. Taking him along, of course. I

don't suppose many high priests had their own tame god to show off.

After awhile I turned and walked impressively back to the temple, hardly looking at anyone, but leaving a few priests behind that stared in puzzlement at the tree. Tree worship was pretty common in the galaxy and I had thought I was safe but apparently it had never occurred to them to revere a *tree* and this puzzled them.

Back in the temple Kor communicated to me that a band of priests were en route from various temples in the countryside and that tomorrow or the next day was my deadline. It was then a missing fact dropped into place. I hadn't even noticed it wasn't there, which shows you how perceptive I am.

I found out my name.

My god-name, of course. I told him the name that's on my spacer union card, but he just figured it to be a nickname, I guess, like Tex or Shorty or Glantha or Spacehead. Lots of gods have a multitude of names, probably because as a religion grows it absorbs minor godlings and the name sticks. The old Catholic Church (not the new Reformed one, of course) used to make local gods into saints. On Hanuman XII their chief god has twelve million names, or a third more than the Buddhist version.

And my god-name was Zar.

Zar, the god. Robert Arthur Carr, 39733906, better known as Zar, the god of Zarkan.

It didn't sound bad once you got used to it. Sounded rather grim at

first. Zar the Triumphant. Zar the Conqueror. Zar the Lord of the Heavenly Horde. Zar the Mighty. Personally, I would have chosen something more in the line of Zeus or Bacchus or even Pan. Those guys had fun. I served on the old Triplanet freighter *Bacchus* in '48 and those apes tried to live up to the name in every port on the Rim. I shipped one trip only on the *Cromwell* and *those* guys were just so damned *straight* as to be unlivable.

So it was Zar for me.

Providing I wanted the job.

Looking at it in a very pragmatic manner there wasn't much I could do *but* take it. I had no place to go, I couldn't seem to go there anyway without an escort, and time was deadlining me.

So I got Kor out of here and banished the slavegirls to the other side of the wall (temporarily, of course; those girls were a winning argument for Kor's proposition). Then I started talking into this recorder, mainly to kind of think it out out loud. You know how explaining something to someone tends to reveal the flaws?

By the time you people at Central get this, if you ever do, I might be long gone and no memory left of Bob Carr. On the other hand I might be able to do something for these mudballers. They were priestridden, that's for sure, but with their very own acclaimed god doing the changing what could they do?

Well, assassinate you, you droon!

God done gone back to hebbin, folk. Once they accepted me as a god they couldn't very well say, "Hey, he ain't no god after all!" The only way out was a quick, silent burial under the temple someplace and the priests who bonked me get plunked down someplace, too, and Kor or his sucessor looks pious and says how the god went back to the sky.

But outside of that what could they do? They didn't seem to have a tradition of their god having to prove himself in combat or anything, like the Odin system. So I could start to reshape their culture towards something a little more civilized. I can see the droons in the Galactic Anthro departments frelking themselves now! But they aren't here and I am. They don't have to listen to the toots, whistles and bongs that pass for music here. They don't have to look at gloomy priests and catch the smells from the slaughter house when the wind changes. They don't have to worry about a knife in the night. A little benevolent dictatorship in the lives of these people right now might be just dandy.

I'll think about that as soon as I decide whether or not I'm taking the job as God Numero Uno, Zarkan Division.

Well, I guess time's up. I hear them trumpeting another batch of priests into the compound and that must be the last one. Kor will be along soon, probably with his god intro speech all rehearsed.

What will I tell him?

I bet I could get some freedom and keep the harem by saying I was going out to convert the rest of the world. Unless it's already one big Zar parish.

I'll think of something. After all, I'm an *Earthman*, a top-rated spacer, and these clowns are last year's mudballers!

Hear that? It's Kor. Well, talk to you later. I guess there's only one answer a red-blooded god candidate can give, isn't there?

THIS IS MY SECOND message to you, back there. A lot of time has passed and there certainly have been a lot of changes.

I know you guessed what my decision was. I don't suppose many people would pass up a god job if it were offered to them. My reasoning was really more practical than egotistic.

I'm stuck here. Zar is a *long* way from both the regular spaceways and from the lines of exploration that are being developed. A lot of the action is going towards Cygni and Velorum. There are a lot of systems that way, each with three or four Terra-style planets. That freak planet Martinelli III was found out that way and it was nearly 40% Gallium and Germanium and rich in lots of other things. Practically a lab specimen and it was 6,000 miles in diameter! It was the big "find" and started serious exploration *that* way.

Which is the *other* way from here.

The lifeboat's autoalarm was dinged right out of working order by that dumb landing I made, so *that's* out.

Oh, I will probably get picked up *some* day, but meanwhile what do I do?

I took the godship offer, naturally.

But I took it with the idea of improving things. Once again, it was for basically selfish reasons. As long as I had to spend X years out here in the outlands I might as well make things comfortable for me. And to make things nice it was necessary to make things nice for everyone, but whatthell, I'm a generous guy.

These people really weren't the most sanitary-minded in this arm of the galaxy, you see. So I started them on bigger soap manufacture and that meant a better water supply system. Getting myself a choice young damsel that was just *delicious* except that she had a rash, I started everyone on a better diet. I imported some lettuce-like things called *scarti* from a province out towards Zor, a neighboring country. I gave divine approval to some shipbuilding ventures that brought in more fish, especially a favorite of mine called the *marg-lefor* which tastes like a cross between tuna and pineapple.

I think most of my ventures are called *enlightened self interest*.

But before long there were stormclouds on the horizon. I didn't figure that running a country, even one as basically primitive as mine,

was ever going to be easy. What I didn't count on were religious fanatics!

I had settled down into a nice lush life and had really gotten into the sacrificial virgin thing. Pretty soon they weren't acting noble about their sacrifices. Those girls didn't even act annoyed. For most of them it was the best life they'd ever known.

They learned a few tricks I had picked up in stations from the Sahara. Prime to Siva. I learned about the holy Zarkan horizontal love dances.

But it couldn't last. I guess not even godhood is permanent. Somebody just *had* to spoil it.

I didn't pick up on all that was happening right away, you see, I'm pretty much used to live and let live. Most spacers are that way. Most, but not all. We see a lot of pretty strange sights, from the politeness cults on Rigel XVII to the noon-hour madness on the Eastern Seaboard Complex of Earth.

I'd heard about the Zorites and the Jullalians beyond them, and the Xerons half way around Zar. Old Kor filled me in on the ambassadors that would soon be coming my way to pay their respects to the new Krelbian Zarkan leader. Even the little Filorians were going to send someone to size me up.

Kor had sent out runners, I found out later, to spread the word of Krelb's brand new religious miracle in the form of an authentic god.

Kor also arranged a big ceremony installing me as God of Zar. I

thought it was a bit presumptuous, since there were several other gods worshipped here and there around Zar, but with the blinders of the true believer he had decided I was *it*. He wouldn't even listen to me about it and I was the god he was worshipping!

Then word started coming back that the Zorite Zarkans had not one, but *two* brand new gods. I discounted it as jealousy. But I kept hearing tales of miracles much like the miracles I had performed and it struck me that I had at last found Manning and Benford!

I laughed like hell when I figured that one out and old Klandor couldn't understand me at all. I ordered up a six-pak of lovelies that I had taught a rather bawdy Luanan drinking song to, one I knew any randy spacer would like, and sent them over to Zor. With them, to make it look official, I sent along this priestlet, or sub-priest, or whatever they called him. I gave him a message for the boys.

He came back. He was blind and his fingers were stubbed short.

I couldn't believe it. What kind of uncivilized nuts were they over there? For awhile I thought maybe it *wasn't* Manning and Benford after all. They weren't my first choice for Sunday brunch with the chaplain and they were as randy and as rough as any other spacer, but they hadn't struck me as *nuts*.

The poor maimed bastard stumbled out his tale about going to the Zorite capital, many days ride away, and being greeted by black-

clad soldiers who roughed him up and threw them all in prison. They were very offended by the nudity of the girls, even though they had been riding in litters and well hidden. They executed all the girls in the square, tied into black sacks without even an eyehole.

"Why?" I demanded. "It's all so insane!"

The poor busted up priest was near to collapse, but Kor got it all out of him and gave me the word. It seems the Zorites, normally a rather prudish and authoritarian bunch, had really gotten behind their new religion. It really wasn't so much new, as a tightening up of their old, crushing any sort of deviation and even tolerance. Non-Zorites could come and go as traders but had to live in a special quarter of the city. They were frequently taxed so heavily as to bankrupt many of them. Small offences of both foreigner and subject were met with swift and severe punishment. No one was encouraged to speak out against the new regime.

The upswing in puritanism coincided exactly with the arrival from Heaven of two authentic, miracle-producing gods, sent by the Great Ones to help the Zorites fulfill their destiny. The new set of gods told them just what to do.

A new, tighter set of religious and political laws were put forth.

A great destiny was forecast for all.

Nothing could stop them. Nothing could resist a people when

its destiny was at hand.

Puritanism was a way of life. The flesh was temptation. Any woman displaying herself as my six girls had was surely the work of Asombis, which is the mudballer's version of Lucifer.

I felt pretty sad about the priest and worse about the girls, but I didn't intend to start any war, holy, unholy or profane. "Live and let live," I told Kor. "I don't care what they do as long as they don't make so much noise I can't sleep at night."

"Oh, Mighty Zar! Oh, Master of the Heavens! Lord of Stars! Keeper of the Yu-yang! Defender of the True! Greatest—"

"*Will you stop that!*" Kor talks like that, you see, and you have to keep a tight grip on him. In public I have to let him get carried away, but in private, it's a no-no. "What is it you're trying to say?"

"They are already marching, master! The evils of Zorite darkness are already befouling our land!"

"You mean they're coming here? An army? Invaders? What the hell are those guys up to? I gotta talk to them!"

It cost me two priestlets to find out they weren't talking.

All us Krelbian Zarkans were nasty and the nastiest of all was a false god known as Lord of Zar. I figured Manning and Benford didn't exactly love me, but we were the only spacers on this mudball! But those frozen frelks wouldn't even parley!

I got mad.

Anger made me a righteous god and I sent out the Holy Warriors of Zar to tell those gorbs to get the hell off my land and stay out of our hair.

We got zapped.

We kept getting zapped for about two months. It was a mess. Once I got into it and saved the Fourth from extinction but I used up damn near every charge in my blaster doing it.

Another time the Zorite gods themselves showed themselves and we lost the Legion of the Mighty to the last man.

Things were not going well. I had to do something. I had to make those idiots understand that this mudball was a thousand years away from any serious population pressure, to go back home and to develop their own turf! There was room enough and food enough for everyone.

But I don't suppose any believers in a True Faith even listened to the voices of reality.

We held them along the Sormite river for awhile and I kept getting atrocity stories from the overrun villages. *Bow down to the new gods or die!* They were exact, rigid and harsh. I had planned to nominate them for the Galactic Intolerance Award but they broke through at Furli and the war was starting to be played on seriously close home ground.

I was hard put to keep the damn Zorites from running over us. I lost the Gorgi Valley but kept them out

of the Voralian plain, which led to the vital Frool pass. Which lead to me.

I also ran out of charges.

My blaster was just ornamental from then on. I kept having to think of excuses for the mighty sword of light *not* being used. But reports of the Zorite gods rarely mentioned *their* swords of light, so I supposed they were running into the same pproblem.

I had to do something. I'm no general. Except for that time on Graef's Planet with those crazy natives and those intelligent slime-molds on Barbara III I had never gunned down anything live. Intelligent life, that is. I'd shot a welthors on Stendahl and tracked horned *drills* on Frostworld. But nothing like zapping those damn fool religious fanatics. It just didn't sit well with me.

I had to do something.

I had to save my own life, for one thing. The Zorite gods had proclaimed my fall and ascent to heaven on several occasions. I had no intention of hiding out in the mountains until a rescue ship dropped in. If it ever did.

My nerves were twanging and I was gloomy. No ship would *ever* arrive, the Zorites would burn me, my handpicked harem of lovelies would be executed by those dumb pleasure-hating goons.

I needed a miracle but I was a god and I didn't have one handy.

I was in trouble. *I needed a miracle!*

Maybe the Gods of Zar, if they exist, work in mysterious ways. I

found my miracle in a most unexpected way.

I'd just come back from a quick swing along the line. I'd "generated" an assault on the Zorite stronghold at Yasmurl. My blaster was empty and I had run out of ideas. I suppose I looked tired and desperate. Fortunately, the Zarkans don't mind a little humanity in their gods.

Kor ordered *tazeel* for me and shortly one of the nubile came back in with this goblet of purple wine. I gloomily thought those Zorites must be raving lunatics if they wanted to cover up anything as yummy as my wine bearer, but I gulped it down.

I sank to the furs and sleeping silks, thinking to disappear from reality awhile in the waiting flesh of two of my best, when—

Zowie!

I was zonked out of my head. Stoned. Blasted. Peeled. Not drunk, you understand, but psyched . . . zapped . . . discorporated . . . as high as a Grildian condor. The temple melted and flowed in many colors. The girls were softer than soft, the furs furrier than fur, the faint smile on old Kor the wild laugh of a demented old friend.

If I hadn't sampled almost everything from the wines of Leary VII to the dream powders from the Poseidon system I might have thought I was going insane. The world was gorgeous, luxurious, beautiful, sensual and in slow motion.

Tazeel was fast, powerful and

deep, fully the equal to any of the zaps from the Pleasure Planets. I had found my answer. If only I had time to spread this miracle around.

I didn't come to planetary touchdown until the next day. I was sore, smiling and hurried. I had given most of the temple maidens some kind of whirl and I still had a body wired for effect. But I had to get going.

Kor showed me where they kept the temple *tazeel*. My elation dissipated somewhat, for there was only about fifty gallons. As powerful as it was, it wouldn't be enough.

"Where do you get it?" I asked Kor. The *tazeel* plant, of course, just now coming to peak. The buds, the flowers, and topmost leaves. "What do we have to do with it then?" Crush the gatherings, mix with a little wine . . . lo! *tazeel!*

I went into furious action. "Round up the guards! Roust the girls! Get those reserves moving! Call out the palace legion! We're going to harvest!"

For two days the temple was a factory. The leaves and flowers were ground into powder and normally that would have been mixed with a little special wine, for *tazeel* was reserved for the religious brotherhood and the higher powers in the community. But a little talk with the happy fat priest that supervised the *tazeel* distillation told me plain water would do, as the wine was just for taste.

I had all the glass jars and bottles rounded up and sent to the *tazeel* processing center. When I got there

I found that everyone was as high as a Draconis wind viper. It hit me, too, in a few minutes. It was the miniscule powder from the crushings floating in the air.

As soon as I came down I changed the plan. I eliminated the water base and struck directly to the essence.

I had my miracle, if they could only produce enough.

I went into my harem and started to train my Special Troops.

My scouts brought me intelligence in a steady stream. The Zorites had forced the pass at Quaymar and were coming across the Voralian plain in one huge group.

I sent the Legion of the Sword of Light to harass them and give me a little more time. I sent my Special Troops into the city with a special command from Zar himself.

The girls swarmed through the streets, selecting every good-looking girl and woman and sweeping her along with them. Within two hours I had the temple square filling with frightened females. Klandor whispered to me that rumor had it I was about to bribe the dread Zorites with the cream of Krelbian beauty. I could see he thought it might be true, so I went out onto the temple roof and commanded silence.

"*I am Zar,*" I cried in my deepest, loudest voice. What I needed was a loudspeaker, but I didn't have it so I spoke loud. "*I give you a command! You are to save your city . . . your country*

. . . yourselves! The Zorites are possessed by false gods, gods who deny the pleasures of the flesh—pleasures that you know, and know are good! They would make you forsake the good things in life and serve juiceless black gods! But you—and the gods of Zar—shall vanquish them!

I wasn't sure they'd do what I wanted, even if it was a command from a real live god. Women are strange on whatever planet you find them. The women of Zar that I had found were *very* female in those departments with which I was familiar. I suspected they might be just as arbitrary, perverse and exciting in others.

But I told them what I wanted them to do. At the top of my voice. There was a hesitation murmuring, a nervous shifting. I thought I had lost. You couldn't make them do it at the point of a spear. Not this job. They had to want to do it.

Then another miracle happened. It was the sort of miracle I could have arranged if I had thought of it, but I hadn't. Maringo, one of the tastiest of the sacrificial maidens, delivered the miracle from the steps of the temple below me.

She stood tall and lithe and built like a Eros XII love offering. She cried out to the mob in the square and made it into an army.

"*Women of Zar! Would you let the Zorite beasts rule us? The god of Zar has commanded us! Let us make ourselves ready!*

With a theatrical gesture she ripped away the thin gauze of her

clothing, shredding the beaten copper ornaments, scattering the pieces and stood triumphantly nude, arm upraised, her eyes flashing.

There was silence for a second, then a roar.

Clothing ripped. Shards of fabric were thrown high. Bare arms flashed in the sunlight. There was laughter and blushes.

Then at last it was still, except for the exciting breathing of three thousand totally nude young woman. Six thousand ripe young breasts rose and fell in warm sunlight. Six thousand eyes stared at me. Three thousand mouths held back a cry.

I pointed east. *"To the pass at Bazra!"*

"BAZRA!"

It was a roar and the roar became a surge. East, to Bazra. Three thousand naked warriors for Zar. They moved.

Each with a jar of *tazeel*.

My shoulders slumped, my heart racing. A crisis met and passed. I looked down as I heard a cry from below. It was Maringo.

"My lord!"

She stared at me with fierce intensity, her smile brilliant. Then she leaped gracefully out into the square and with long lithe legs she ran across the carpet of discarded clothing and out the Gate of Kings.

This was it. Win or lose. I turned and ran down the stone stairs and to my mount.

WE WAITED.

The Legion of the Sword of Light was all I had left and it stood only

two deep across the mouth of "my" end of the pass. The naked girls I concealed in the rocks high on either side of the narrow cleft in the high hills.

A scout came galloping in from the other side of the pass. They were coming in. I signalled a trumpet-horn and distantly I heard the sounds of a skirmish begin.

Bee stings.

Irritants that would make the Zorites compact, get mad, and coming rushing.

In a few moments our beesting troop rode in fast. There were empty saddles, too. They went through the line of the Legion and then regrouped. Everyone was tense. We could hear the growl-horns and the clank of metal.

The Zorite scouts were into sight first, stopped, reconnoitered swiftly and returned to the main body.

We waited.

They came around the curve of the pass in a rush. Screaming, blackclad warriors, each with the strength of ten for his heart was pure and he was fighting the Minions of the Wicked.

My Legion went into phalanx, shields up, spears out. The charge broke on their unyielding wall. I had gotten the idea from the ancient Terran Romans, but it was a new one here. But no mere trick was going to win this battle for me and this battle was what was left of the whole stupid war.

But I had to bottle the Zorites up, bunch them into one big lump. If I couldn't then my plan probably was

not going to work.

From the screaming chants of the black-clad Zorites it was clear they thought I was the driving force of evil, a corrupting sore on the face of Zarkan. Furthermore, anyone who was on my side was facing certain death and a miserable time in the hereafter to boot.

I kept tearing my eyes away to look to the top of a distant rock. There crouched a single warrior, wounded and unable to fight. But he had eyes. He could see into the pass very clearly. Suddenly he stood, his bright shield waving.

All of the Zorites were now in the pass.

I stood, leaping from my command post behind a rock to the top of it. I had been thinking of a dramatic one-liner, an inspirational command that would look good in a history book. But all I did was wave my sword, point and shout, "Now!"

Three thousand bare arms flashed up and down the pass, all along the bristly line of Zorite warrior. Bottles and jars and globes flashed in the sun, arcing out and down.

The trained warriors caught the movement, their battered shields coming up fast, and most of the glass broke against the jagged symbol painted there. There were puffs of purple dust everywhere, drifting into slowly settling clouds.

For a moment there was no action as the Zorites waited, tense and alert. Then there was a shouted command, a deep-throated roar

answering as the determined soldiers started the charge that would sweep the pass, break the Krelbians and win their gods a planet.

My phalanx was hit and pressed back. Men went down under the blows of too many savage warriors. I held my breath.

But the Zorites hadn't.

It hit them seconds before I figured the phalanx was lost. Stunned expressions gave way to gapes, then laughter. A few of the men panicked with staring eyes and crawled slobbering under rocks.

The charge lost momentum and stopped. A sword was discarded in a flurry of laughter. A shield crashed to the rocks, unneeded. Another sword, two, six.

I signaled again with a wave and three thousand nude girls started down the steep hillside and into the Zorite horde. The clouds of purple *tazeel* had settled and been breathed and had drifted away.

With breasts bouncing, legs flashing, hair streaming the new, naked army of Zarkans flowed over the laughing, stunned Zorites. The Zorite code of ascetic life vanished before wide smiles and proffered bodies. Armor was discarded to better feel the willing flesh. Black robes were used to soften the rough floor of the pass.

Hard-armed warriors with faces breaking into unfamiliar smiles siezed rounded wenches. More and more black robes with their fierce symbols were discarded.

Laughter boiled up from the pass.

Swords tinkled on rocks. Shields clattered, kicked by careless feet.

It had worked!

I stared down at the writhing bodies with elation. Almost all the Zorites had abandoned their tight masks of repression and were obviously enjoying themselves. Undoubtedly some of them would recant and return to the gloomy, pleasure-rejecting Zorite code, but for most of them they were doomed.

Doomed to a memory of, for once, really enjoying themselves. That can change any man.

As I watched the phalanx of the Legion dissolved and walked through the pass, collecting swords and spears. A few gave way to temptation and lay with a laughing girl, but most were able to resist. After all, two hundred yards of orgy was not all that strange to a good Krelbian Zarkan.

There were a few unfortunate accidents. The Zorite commander went out of his head and cut open the naked body of a willing wench. But his own men disarmed him and he went into his brain, curled up and never came out. Some bend, some break.

Two or three girls were killed by freaked out soldiers and a lot more had their backs and buttocks lacerated by rolling around on abandoned swords and pieces of equipment. But no one thought it was a high price to pay for winning a war.

The trouble was, they didn't know it still had one act to go.

I headed back, pushing my mount. I still had one last important job to do or the war could still be lost. Or at least a statemate reached . . . with me dead.

I cut across the city plain and hunted for what seemed like agonizingly long hours for the wreck of the lifeboat. I was coming in from another angle and nothing looked the same. But this was the first time I had had any real freedom to gut the ship of things I might need in my god business.

It took me two hours to dismantle the antigravity unit and the secondary power unit. It took me three hours to get them into the temple, lugging them on my worn-out mount.

The priests thought their very own god had gone birdy when I ordered them to install the two units under a massive slab just inside the main temple doors.

I told them it was god stuff and not to think too much about it, just do it. When they were finished I got them out of there and got Kor, who had been prostrate before the altar for two days praying, to get out and do some organizing. I could see he, too, thought his very own tame god had gone *zip* off the deep end. I read his face as he thoughtfully considered getting rid of me and what he was going to tell the others.

"It isn't over yet, Kor, you old frelker. There is still a battle of the gods on the schedule. Now here's what I want you to do."

I got him cracking and then started hooking up the hidden units.

I trailed control wires through the cracks between the stones and under rugs and right up to the throne on the dais. I knew I hadn't much time. By this time Manning and Benford must know about the defeat at the pass.

They'd be here soon. Probably in their lifeboat for maximum effect on the natives.

And probably with one last blaster charge.

The first of the girls were coming back, their arms around naked and half-naked Zorites. The still-hallucinating Zorites and a laughing Krelbian legion filled up the square, splashing in the fountains and making love in the arches to three thousand girls high on victory and sex.

I found Kor, looking properly impressed at my victory, and had him shape the laughing mob into the positions I wanted. I went into the square and selected a half dozen of my best girls, including a shiny-eyed Maringo.

The girls quickly bathed and I dressed them in nothing but the finest jewels and beaten gold ornaments from the treasury. I arranged them artfully on the throne and environs, had some fruit, ordered a musician to play some light and airy *harpeltor* music, and waited.

It wasn't too long. I paced around some and the girls picked up on my nervousness. I refused Maringo's erotic offerings and kept taking peeks out the temple door at the eastern sky.

I saw the ballship zoom into view,

then halt for a moment on the distant horizon, their scanners looking us over.

Stepping out onto the broad temple steps I raised my arms. A set of amorous trumpeters untangled themselves and sent a brassy shout out over the square of writhing bodies.

"I, God of Zar, command the false gods of the Zorites to appear!"

I was going for broke, but I think I looked pretty impressive. Lo! like magic the Zorite godship whooshed up to hover over the square. More than a few, most Krelbians, screamed and started to run, but I pumped air into my lungs and let them have it.

"HOLD! I, God of Zar, command you to welcome the defeated enemy! I will await them in the temple, where they will acknowledge subservience!"

I turned and swept into the temple, my heart pounding. The lifeboat had no armament, so I wasn't afraid they'd zap anyone until they got out. Looking at it from their point of view, figuring they couldn't hear me anyway inside the ship, they could just have won after all. Maybe they'd think the Zorites had slipped a little and could be whipped back into shape.

I was counting on them to get out and come in to eliminate me as a rival god, then they could go about putting back together their shattered god-dom.

The ship eased to the square's smooth stones and the circling

crowd cheered and smiled, including the zonked Zorites. I kept back in the darkness of the temple and watched them.

Manning and Benford got out, wearing black robes, but with elaborate helmets, probably concealing some radio equipment. They were carrying blasters and backed by a dozen hard-faced elite warriors. They looked around cautiously, stared suspiciously up the opened lane of people towards the temple doors.

Slowly they started towards me, wary of traps, blasters ready. I moved back in the darkness. A section of Zorites, sweaty and disheveled, but with wide grins on their faces, surged forward to greet their hero-gods, inviting them to join the party.

With an abrupt gesture Manning ordered the elite guard to shove back the revelers and to start establishing order in the "drunken" mob. Benford looked more puzzled than angry, but Manning was striking sparks with his eyes.

Slowly they came up the temple steps, between lines of cheering, laughing Zarkans of every type and sex. I ducked on back, climbed the throne and picked up the antigrav control button.

They stopped at the threshold, not yet over the slab concealing the antigrav unit. They hugged the sides of the entrance, guns ready. I hoped they would not fire on sight. And the sight was impressive.

A dozen jeweled nudes clustered about me. Wine cups and caskets of

jewels littered the steps of the dais. Rich fabrics contrasted with voluptuous bodies. The *harpeltor* sounds were quiet, soothing.

I needed a little time, time to get them positioned. I was certain that their idea for me was death and the nicest thing they could do was a quick blaster charge. But the girls, the riches, the *casualness* of the confrontation would slow them down. They wouldn't want to zap all that wealth out of existence as long as I wasn't threatening them.

"Hail, fellow gods!" I called out to them in Univers.

"What the hell is going on?" Manning growled. "What are our men doing out there?"

"We'll have some heads today and the whipping posts will be busy all night," Benford snarled. I had never liked those two much and their solutions to problems were a little too final for me.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," I said from the center of the writhing mass of jeweled nubile. "Why do you do these crazy things? The planet is big enough, and we'll be picked up sooner or later."

"Frelk you, Carr," Benford snapped. "We're going to *own* this planet. Why go back? We'll *control* it! They'll all do what we want! A whole planet for ourselves, not just stinking spacer pay and a puny payout at the end. I'm not going to end my days hanging around some spaceport bar swapping old lies with other old studs. This whole damn planet, Carr, *this whole planet* is going to do what we tell

them to do!"

"They do what I want them to do now," I said. "At least here in Krelb." *Step closer you apes!* "But I don't have to put this totalitarian life onto them. Hell, I'm a god, you're gods, why not leave it at that?"

"Because you are the evil we want to stamp out!" Manning exclaimed. "You are the face of sin! Libertine! Frelker!" He was really getting worked up. Manning had the dangerous attitudes of the True Believer. The hidden puritan was really riding his back. He'd become the kind of man you had to kill to stop.

Manning waved his blaster in my direction. I sure hoped it was empty. Maybe he was just carrying it as a symbol of power, as I had done after my charges had been used up.

"Come on, you dummies," I said. "Enjoy yourselves. Take a woman. Take three. Let a half dozen of them give you a rubdown. Have some wine."

Manning took a step closer. "I don't know what you're up to, Carr," he grumbled. "But it won't last. We'll get that army sobered up and tell them you went to god heaven."

Benford smiled nastily. "We figure your charges were used up long ago, that's why we didn't blast you when we saw you. Now you just step away from that pile of loot or we'll send all those pretties upstairs with you."

"You're going to try and kill

me?" I smiled. I didn't feel like smiling, but I did.

"Try?" Benford snapped. He stepped forward onto the slab and Manning came with him. They swung their guns up and aimed.

I pressed the control stud.

The antigravity unit heaved the big slab up through the temple roof and into space.

Manning and Benford were on top of the slab. At least parts of them were. There was some evidence on the parts of the roof that fell back that not all of them went spacewards.

The power unit was good for maybe four months at sublight. After that the rock would just coast. Forever probably. Not that the passengers on that rock ship would ever know, of course.

The crowd in the square were pretty impressed. They almost sobered up. They shouted my praises a while then went back to the new-found religious ceremonies.

Kor was very impressed and hastened to tell the people I had sent the enemy gods back to Valhalla. They had never heard of Valhalla but I assured them that all gods had such a home in the stars.

I didn't tell them that someday I may go there.

Someday.

Maybe.

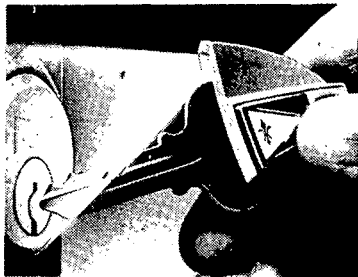
Meanwhile, there's a lot to do here.

THE RESCUE SHIP is here, at last.

Only I don't want to be rescued.

The big Minotaur sits out there

(cont. on page 114)



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From somewhere inside his head he heard and felt—

THE SUN-HUNTERS

DAPHNE CASTELL

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

FIRST, THE THUDDING, the muffled drum-tuck; slowly sometimes, but often in breathcatching, irregular haste. It was never even or stately; merely ominous.

It was like the solemn beats which announce or end great tragedies, but not regular—it was more like the anxious heartbeats of actors in such tragedies.

On some nights, he was too sleepy to do more than accept the familiar beginning, subsiding into it resignedly. It always engulfed him, but sometimes he made a faint furious resistance. Then it stood back a pace, before the final gulp, as if it waited for his hot whirling mind to spin itself to rest.

The moment he was actually in the dream, the thudding became so clear and decisive, that it was as if he could never have doubted what it was—the deep cry of metal on metal.

Someone was building. For months, someone had been building patiently in serried recesses of his mind.

As if work and the day stamped them down with no trace, he forgot the sounds, until the night brought them out again. Not every night.

On many nights, he dreamt multi-coloured, easily shattered dreams. They threw themselves like kaleidoscope crystals against the screens of his mind. His sleep mirrored them, patterned them, dissolved them easily.

Only, every once in a while, there came a night when all the other business of dreams had to be shelved.

He had read somewhere that dreams lasted only seconds. That seemed laughable to him, in the few terrified moments after he awoke, when he remembered the months that seemed to have passed since he had shut his eyes.

There came a point in his dreams when the thudding changed subtly. Was the work done, or was it now different? Was this maintenance?—revision?—repair? He had become accustomed to interpreting this sound in terms of his own hearing—

now he must alter his wavelength. Perhaps they were communicating—with him?—or making music—or simply shifting lights or substances in some continuum in which the effect produced was what seemed to him a thudding.

He became conscious that he was considering the noise as if it were made by beings of some kind, and he woke, sweating heavily.

He did not feel well that day, in his work at the library, and his senior scientific officer came over once or twice to speak to him on some pretext, and looked at him curiously.

Finally he said, "Look, Antrim, you're not fit to be here today. What made you come? Do you feel as if you might be sickening for something or other?—don't want to pass it on, do you?"

Antrim said apologetically, "No, Mr. Bannick. But I've only had a— a bad night. I'd rather stay."

The scientific officer looked at him doubtfully. "Those cuttings can wait—in fact, I'd rather they did, than have you catalogue them wrongly. Some of that information could be top-importance and top-secret, you know. We've a duty to the research staff to make sure it's filed in the right place."

He wasn't conscious of being fussy or unpleasant, merely that he stated a simple truth. He was a small worried man in glasses, strutting a little, unconsciously, as he looked up at his tall assistant, with a trace of irritability.

Antrim blinked weak blue eyes.



He felt a little guilty about being taller than his superior officer, and about possessing contact lenses. What right had he to them, when Mr. Bannick didn't have any? His mother had given them to him, but he sometimes felt he oughtn't to have accepted such a superior status symbol.

He closed his eyes, and found himself rocking a little. He opened them again quickly, persuading himself that there had not been a slow roll of preparation in the darkness, as if something was getting ready to begin violent action.

"Go home, Antrim," said Mr. Bannick quickly and decisively. "You've got flu, or you're getting it." Mr. Bannick usually knew these things, and anyway, Antrim couldn't have questioned his judgment. It might have hurt his feelings; and hurting people's feelings was an action he was almost incapable of—partly because he was kind and weak, but more because he lacked the necessary knowledge and deliberation to go about it.

So he went home, explaining to his mother when he got there that he was "a little seedy—oh, nothing really. Just not myself."

He went to sleep on the couch by the fire that afternoon; and as he slept, the light that had been coveting a stage, held so determinedly by the drumming, broke through for the first time.

It spread itself magnificently and malevolently over the patterns of his dream. It was indescribable, but

compounded of all colours. It had a defined, solid centre, and wherever its clear boundaries stood it created the impression of an immense hollow all round it. Usually, where light ceases to have influence, surrounding darkness becomes more dense and encroaching.

But this light was different. It told clearly of what was not lit by it, and it somehow made echoes louder and more lonely. What was not shown was magnified in strength and threat.

Antrim shrank with the sheer terror of mere size. Even the thudding which he had grown used to seemed to resound with greater menace. There must be some unthinkable wall or barrier, to reflect the sound.

He felt that he was in the centre of space, veined with this light, ringing with incomprehensible dread. It was the first time that he had seen here as well as heard, and the booming and clanging and glowing shook all his senses until he hardly realized what he was receiving.

Oddly enough, he felt his terror echoed from several other small sources round him. Perhaps the barrier thing picked cries bouncing off the surface of his mind.

His mother woke him, bringing him a cup of tea and a sandwich. She asked concernedly whether he wouldn't be better in bed.

"You look very hot, Gerry. Your tie is all up under one ear. You shouldn't sleep so close to the fire—I think it's made you feverish. I wonder, if I gave you one of those

powders you had when you were sick last month—”

Antrim accepted a powder anxiously. He felt that the very act of taking something was bound to help—a kind of talisman against the wicked powers that were all round people, waiting to inject germs or hallucinations, fevers or sudden desires to rip off women’s clothing on buses. He had always felt the strongest sympathy for anyone who had given way to some sudden insane urge.

Obviously, you could never return to your senses after performing an act like this. What, meet the aggrieved, unbelieving, uneasy sympathy of those who had seen it happen?—far better to retreat into hopeless and permanent insanity.

He had his drink and his powder, and then, to his mother’s surprise and disapproval, two stiff whiskies. They kept whisky for the use of guests, and because an American friend of his dead father’s had once taught Antrim to mix an Old-Fashioned.

His mother felt it somehow to be a healthy drink, because of the fruit-juice; but they never drank whisky when they were alone.

She tried now to laugh. “My son!—turning into an alcoholic!—Gerry, dear, I should have made you sign the pledge at five, shouldn’t I, like little Dicky Henshaw down the road.” The Henshaw family had long been a private joke between them; but for some reason, tonight Antrim could

not be bothered with them.

“I couldn’t write, when I was five,” he reminded his mother, and watched her mouth open and close wordlessly, with some deep obscure satisfaction. Perhaps he should have resisted Mr. Bannick after all. It was odd how pleasant such an act could be, once in a way.

He slept dreamlessly that night, and for some nights after. But he did not deceive himself—he knew that his dream simply waited patiently to resume its regular habits.

When he saw them at last, they were simply standing, contemplative, very silent. Even the thudding had muted, providing a background only, perhaps for music or speech. Neither came that night, or if they did, he was unaware of it.

His senses were fully occupied with the people—he knew they were people, ‘things’ would be quite wrong, though he could not see them clearly. The misty blaze of the light and the hollow darkness round it made them indistinct; and the texture of the dream changed all shapes, even as he found them out. In any case, they were unlike anything he could compare them to.

They were creatures of his dream, but he had no connection with them. They stood and looked at the fire, and by their presence added to the booming and the glow of the deep places round them.

But, several dreams later, they began to talk to each other; in the mad, sensible way of dreams,

Antrim caught fragments of their speech, knitted them together, and made a tidy weave of them.

They were makers, or repairers. They did work that was needed, and they were the sole judges of need or priority. Sometimes they used tools or machines. More often, they could effect what was needed by viewing, and concentrating the collected powers of their thoughts. Antrim felt faintly pleased at the fertile resources of his own mind, that could dream such images.

They had built a platform in a niche of the fabric of space, by means which Antrim did not like to think of too much. Now they were observing, piecing together, drawing conclusions.

"Mr. Bannick," said Antrim, looking up from a request for all articles dealing with paramagnetism that had appeared in the pages of *Nature* in the past two years. "Mr. Bannick, how would anyone set about putting up a platform in space, do you think?"

Mr. Bannick pushed aside a clip of cuttings over which he had been clicking an irritable tongue for some minutes. "Antrim, you've been reading the nuclear engineering snippets again—do you have to pick the ones with the popular approach? What sort of platform?—a kind of satellite, do you mean? A launching platform? The kind of thing we may well assemble ourselves when we get sorted out up there?"

Mr. Bannick took proud proprietary responsibility for the varying

world space projects.

"No," said Antrim doubtfully. Already the question was beginning to seem formless under the dry glare of sunlight. "Just a platform. With metal struts and things, I think. Hanging there." He smiled feebly.

Mr. Bannick looked at him in slight alarm. "Antrim, you know the sort of thing that's been visualized, surely?—a wheel satellite, perhaps, or some kind of open kite-shaped framework, with living space along it. An observatory first, then perhaps a springboard to other worlds. What's the *matter* with you, Antrim? You're not a scientist, but you're a well-trained, well-read librarian. Thinking of writing science-fiction, perhaps?" As this thought occurred to him, Mr. Bannick's tone grew a little more indulgent.

Antrim blushed. "I don't quite know where my mind was taking me." But he had known, only too well. Back to his towering platform of light in dark, the voices, the dead, frightening lapses of sound, the hollow thudding, taking up where it had paused. "Sometimes I get a little confused. It's not all that easy to apply the right approach when you want to think of something, and you're not a trained scientist."

Mr. Bannick removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He assumed a worried, fatherly, yet jocund air. "You're good enough for me, Antrim, providing you don't try to step outside your field. I'm all for

creative writing, of course—in its place, in its place! But don't forget, down here, boy, we provide the nuts and bolts, the nuts and bolts!"

"I know," said Antrim humbly, "and it's not that I don't feel happy with the work or anything—it's very interesting. But to be a real scientist—that must be really wonderful! Or an engineer."

"I hope you're not feeling you've missed your vocation," said Mr. Bannick sharply. "You may remember the careers adviser at your school told you as strongly as possible that you weren't cut out for a scientist. And engineering—well, the practical qualities needed in an engineer would put it right outside your scope."

"Yes," said Antrim wistfully, "but I have been thinking, if I were a—a specialist in something scientific, I might feel—" he looked round the littered room, and shuffled his filing cards despondently. Mr. Bannick looked noticeably wary.

"Feel what, Antrim?"

"—less nervous," finished Antrim, almost under his breath.

The same evening, he came home to find Mr. Bannick cosily esconced beside his mother, uneasy cup and saucer balanced on one knee. Wisely, he made no attempt to get up, but beamed uncertainly at Antrim, surprised on the threshold.

"Having a wee chat with your mother, Antrim," he explained, with watery benevolence.

"Wondered where I was off to when I left early, did you? Didn't

want to tell you—you might have rung this good lady and spoilt my little surprise. We think a lot of this young man, Mrs. Antrim. Always willing to be told, always ready to accept helpful suggestions. That's more than you can say for most of them. I like to make sure my assistants have good care taken of them when they get home, eh, ha! Ha!"

They plied him cautiously with invitations to stay to supper—the delicious and economic fish-pie would spread, with extra tinned vegetables, to another person.

But he declined, and left, perhaps a little abruptly. Antrim, catching sidelong glances exchanged between them, decided fretfully that Bannick had been extending the field of his warnings.

He shook the crumbs from the cloth into the hearth, and said aloud irritably, "He wouldn't come straight out with it, though: 'Mrs. Antrim, your son's quietly going nuts.'"

His mother, washing up in the kitchen, caught the mutter of his voice, and called, "Have you turned the wireless on, dear? It's time for that quiz." Antrim turned the knob, and found the boom of an early programme warming up, with a crackle of excited static in the background. It reminded him of the dream.

The fear each night grew less, though it remained as a muted background to the uncertain entrance of a new theme.

Now they talked, from time to

time, though the tones alternatively faded to nothing and raced to a pitch beyond the capacity of his dazed senses.

They were trying out possibilities, and discarding them. It was as if they were removing rods from the heart of some huge reactor pile, and thrusting them home again, in different ways, at different rates. Only the rods weren't rods, but some kind of force or control. And the great pile was a star—a sun—his sun. Once he knew this, whether he was deliberately reading it from them, or having it thrust upon him, he was a little easier.

After all, he knew the sun. It was a familiar thing. If this great trickle of fire in front of him was the sun, in an aspect he had never thought of, it was at least nothing alien.

And beings who created effects round a sun—or other stars?—who were interested observers of them, who followed and traced and experimented with them? No, his mind couldn't quite hold that.

It could burst the limits of his brain, if he allowed it all in at once. He thought, peevishly, how unfair it was that sleep should take him into zones he could not deal with.

Once, during the next few days, he snapped at the astounded Mr. Bannick, a thing he had never managed before.

He began refusing supper, and going to bed early, surprising his mother and hurting her feelings. In a strange way, all these things eased him, as if he were loosing onto others the dogs of worry and awe

that he fought nightly now.

He began to feel that a gigantic sense of inferiority had been partly to blame for the fear; and the fear had receded, blotted out by resentment—for was he not a thinking being, a superior product of his own planet? He sensed a gentle laughter somewhere.

It was about this time that he found he could feel and see a little more clearly in this strange place, and knew that he was not, after all, the only member of his race watching dumbly from shadows.

Contact with other human minds was suddenly very easy to catch—it even rubbed off on the daytime hours, watching his mother and knowing what she was going to say before she opened her mouth, or hearing all Mr. Bannick's unspoken irritable words.

There was an old woman in the dream, too. Her impatient family said she had 'funny' turns. There was a little girl a whole continent away, whose mother confided to friends, "She's so sensitive—sleepwalks, and has these terrible nightmares." And only a few buildings off, a mongol boy twitched and whined like a little dog dreaming. They padded in and out of the corners of his senses, all of them anxiously watching the workers at the sun, as he was watching.

He began to feel that they were all noticed, he and the others, by preoccupied if indulgent beings, the workers.

As if a party of engineers or sur-

veyors, sent to work in some lonely and savage place, had partly tamed the wild animals there, made friends with some, left crumbs for others. They were something to relieve the tension of work—silly, but entertaining.

A little more intelligent than animals, perhaps, for sometimes slow, painstaking attempts at explanation were made. At these times, rage rose in him, which he bitterly felt to be like the rage of a kitten thwarted by its owners for its own good.

His work began to suffer, and Mr. Bannick lost patience. "All right, then, Antrim, you *won't* go off and rest—I wash my hands of you. I keep offering you a holiday—I warn you, Antrim, you'll have to pull those socks up. Just give a thought to my position, will you? I admit I've never found it easy to delegate—but I have relied on you, and you're one of the ablest of our younger men. As the institute expands, you're going to have more work and more responsibility—you'll have to watch your step. Get a bit of a break, my boy, for heaven's sake," he added, becoming suddenly human. "Don't go and tatter yourself into a nervous breakdown."

But Antrim fretfully refused to leave or improve, or do anything Mr. Bannick wanted, and by night he and his fellow prisoners of dreams scurried about like bold mice after crumbs, in spite of great danger, or the small boys in aqualungs who paddle round deep-

sea divers, breathless for a chance to help as well as watch. Somehow he felt that by leaving his work, he might be breaking a contact with the dreams, especially if he went on holiday to some new town. And though they still worried and awed him, he had to have them. They were like an addiction now. He even felt a certain sense of injury with the workers—why didn't they take more notice of him? Why, if they knew that he and the others were there, didn't they get bored with them, and throw them out of the dream? Had they even summoned him?—he didn't know, couldn't guess.

On his third supperless evening, he dozed off again on the couch, Fire continued to throb with the beat of metal, and the whispers of the workers grew louder. Tension was strung higher and higher, and then, as if some giant bubble had expanded to breaking-point, the thudding ceased completely. Silence seemed unalterable, as he drifted in the huge void shell.

On him, like slow, heavy, careful blows, descended the thought: "No hope here. Not a trace. A great pity—all efforts of the force on your sun wasted. We are sorry."

The flare was thrown high, and stopped. Darkness rushed in on all sides like an implosion. A thinner bluer thread of light crept in and opened his dreams wide to the implacable waking. He knew that there would be no more dreams, and no more dreamers.

But the time—the time was so

(cont. on page 127)

ABDICATION

C. L. Grant, whose haunting "But The Other Old Man Stopped Playing" appeared in the April issue of our companion magazine, FANTASTIC, offers a brooding reflection on the impact of life on the moon. . .

C.L. GRANT

Illustrated by MIKE HINGE

"**T**WAS BRILLIG," he muttered.

The leaves beyond and below him rustled applause. The stars winked at his wit. A quick stiff breeze caught the heavy door behind him and slammed it shut, leaving him alone on the shadowed porch.

"My audience," he said, waving a mocking arm toward the darkness beyond the splintered railing. "My only audience." He shook his head slowly and closed his eyes briefly against his bitterness. He was ashamed of it, yet accepted without question its inevitability. Years ago he would have thought it nonsense.

"Tonight I will make the telephone call. The last one, I promise you." When cicada protested and shrubbery hissed, he smiled and added, "It's the least I can do; I can do no more. For my country."

Inclining his head in a half-serious bow, he turned smartly on heel and toe (*Didn't think I could*

still do it, he thought) and went inside.

The main hallway, a narrow cavern not stopping until it rose past invisible beams to the roof, bisected the house. Portraits, posters and framed faded clippings only faintly relieved the desert sun white of the walls. Stopping at the first painting, he hooked a thumb in the watch pocket of his black vest and gently stroked his red tie with his free hand. Against a shimmering dark green a man dressed in morning clothes stared smiling at the opposite wall. He was young, with an expanse of black hair the artist had repeatedly, and annoyingly, praised as fittingly leonine. The dark eyes were large, the nose long, the chin split and nearly pointed. His left hand held a Bible, his right raised as if taking an oath.

"I think you made a grave mistake there, Galen," the man said.

"But then, who am I to judge? You're not the same man any longer, are you?"

The portrait only stared across the hall, and the man finally looked back over his shoulder. There was a campaign poster, framed in bright red, hiding behind gleaming glass.

"The Man in the Moon Knows What You Want," he read aloud to the echoes of his heels on the bare floor as he marched in place. "Elect Galen Summers and the Stars Will Be YOURS."

He groaned and shook his head. "Good God, did they really buy that heavenly claptrap?" Nobody answered and he laughed—loudly, truly, and his great mass of white hair fell out of place until he hustled it back with a practiced sweep of his hand. "The question is, of course, did I believe it? Yes, and no. Yes. And no." Then, "Oh good Lord, I'm talking to myself again. Somebody'll think I'm stark staring mad if they ever come to visit."

He froze for a moment as if confused, then hurried down the length of the corridor; he paused only once, at a mirror framed in black. "Gad, but you're distinguished-looking for a, for a young sprout of forty-seven." And his laughter followed him around the corner at the back of the house and into the living room.

Where the light was.

Half a hundred golden-hooded globes no more than a foot in diameter hung from varying lengths of black chain. There were no lamps and he shaded his eyes



against the glare with one hand as he walked to the nearest wall and dialed the brilliance to a glow. Gray was the only carpet in the mansion, and starred with silver; large double-wing chairs were scattered without pattern across the floor, each mated with a small round table and an ash tray on a black stand.

In the far corner of the massive room was a telephone booth.

Again, in a habit so practiced it had become soothing, he gently fingered the knot of his tie as he headed for the nearest chair. Once settled, almost lost, in black leather still shining new, he sighed, opened his vest and loosened his tie. A low stack of letters lay on the table beside him. He stared down at them until the address on the uppermost blurred; then he coughed, carefully, into his hand.

"Well," he said with a relish false to no one but himself. "Less than yesterday, and no doubt more than tomorrow. I must be . . . slipping. Ah well, c'est la vie. Sic transit."

One by one he opened them, read them, searched in them for a hint of the understanding he knew he would not find.

"Dear Mr. President, would you . . . ?"

"Dear President, can you . . . ?"

"Dear Mr. Summers, you probably don't remember me . . . ?"

"Dear Mister President of the USA and the Moon, I am only ten years old and want to fly in a space

ship like yours but my mother she . . . ?"

One by one he read them, searched them, shredded them into paper snow and burned them in the ash tray with the hollow stand. When he was finished, he noted that this one was almost full and he'd have to move to another. In a few days. If any more came.

There'll be no stopping them, he thought, and I'll try like hell to stop them. They'll go out again and again and keep on going and dear God there'll be no stopping them. Give them the stars. Liar!

Names, places, largest cities, smallest towns bobbed sadly through the memories of his Presidency. Groping for a hold on them all, he tasted the pleasures that soothed him, winced at the bitterness that finally, as always, angered him and made him feel young again. His dull black eyes shone, his shoulders stiffened beneath the tailored jacket—and in fists that pressed leather without pounding, his hands were still impressive. This call would probably be the last-time his words would mean anything (he wondered when was the last time he had been listened to). And what was there that he could say that would make sense to anyone, most of all to the ones he wanted desperately to convince? He closed his eyes tightly and sought for a reference, a foundation.

In the hallway were a series of newspaper photographs: twin

opaque domes on a landscape familiarly lunar; a man in a Cyclopean pressure suit jumping, juggling, waving while the Earth dominated the background and eventually drew the eyes away; a man in shirtsleeves at a tiny table eating, shaving, reading, waving self-consciously at the camera.

The old-young man considered and rejected them. Too long ago, he thought. "Too long ago for people's memories," he said aloud and was pleased anew at the deep muscled undertone of his voice. "Perhaps instead, I should rent some time or a hall and make . . ." He grinned and jabbed impatiently at a stud buried in the arm of the chair, heard the recorder engage and listened intently to the tape until he found what he wanted and played it back repeatedly, as if he had forgotten it. Almost maliciously he saw clearly the honorable Senators and most worthy Representatives nearly falling out of their hallowed seats in shock. *Poor timing*, he thought, but continued to listen.

"It will certainly come as no surprise to you that I believe in Space and in the potential it offers not only for this country, but for all men. In fact, gentlemen, as some of you have already gently and not so gently implied, my twenty-eight months on our sister in space has probably made me more of an expert on comets and stars than on the earthly occupation of politics (quiet laughter, partisan applause). Perhaps this is so. But it is obvious

to me now that I must, *must*, take advantage of that particular realm of which I have more direct knowledge than any man alive and urge you—now!—to listen to what I know and stop (cries), go no further (shouts), do not, I repeat, do not dream until you and the world can handle that dream. (His voice rose to be heard) The bill you have sent to my desk is . . . it is the first step toward racial suicide! Please, gentlemen, let me tell you what it is like to be . . ."

He laughed to drown out the furious shouts and indignant screams bellowing into the room. He laughed until the tape began again, then clapped once, jabbed another stud and listened to more of the same, right up until the day he had been defeated by the most lopsided vote in history. No one, he had remarked caustically, even remembered the finally fading ghettos or the patient pervasive peace . . . only his words, not his deeds.

Ah well, such is politics, he thought . . . "You don't *know*, you can't know what it is like . . ."

Compromise and pressure . . . "You forget about God, forget about heaven and hell too, and there's nothing but you, naked in the sky."

Exhilaration and frustration . . . "Now that I am one of you, but more because I am one who knows, and now that the prestige of my office no longer burdens me, I am *begging* you!"

Frustration and failure.

He jabbed again and what the world called his madness sank without comment into the dust-like carpet. His eyes stung. His ears deafened him with a quiet, high-pitched hum that vanished when he struck his forehead once. "Stale stuff," he muttered and moved to another chair, the same as the first. He knew that there had to be a way, a new way to tell them what they were doing. Slowly a sense of urgency invaded the calm he had forced upon himself. He was startled when he allowed himself to feel and noticed his fists and the taut muscles of his neck were trembling. Urgency to helplessness, a bitten-off whimper, and he wanted desperately to scream out his protest to a world that refused to hear, would not or could not listen. *I'd best be careful, he thought, lest some visitor come rapping at my mansion door and think me mad.* He rose, circled the chair and lay his hands heavily on its back.

Sweeping the rooms with dull-bright eyes, he saw the faces (thousands to millions; he'd lost count) that were once young and healthy and so soul-satisfyingly adoring (a girl, he had forgotten her age, wrote to say she called him King Apollo, and, through his less than decorous press secretary and a few less tradition-bound newspapers, the name stuck). Their mouths opened, their eyes widened in tears; hands, handkerchiefs, posters, babies waved in autumn-spring breezes under sun-clouds in field-streets. Hastily he buttoned his vest, re-set

his tie and cleared his throat.

"I have been twice honored in my lifetime, my dear friends: I am the first man to live on the moon; I was your President. Perhaps (he allowed the bare, actor's hint of a rueful smile to cross his tanned, unlined face) one of you out there will be the first on Mars, or Titan, or even the moons of Jupiter; perhaps one of you right there in the front will defeat me in an election." He paused and washed himself in the tearful protests of a million worshippers. "So, allow me to tell you a bedtime story:

"Once upon a time a man heard the far-off sound of a locomotive on a prairie, and he knew loneliness, and he cried. Once upon a time a man heard a fog horn wailing through the mist that shrouded his ship, and he too knew loneliness . . . and he too cried. And, my friends, my very dear friends, once upon a not so long time ago a man heard a coyote bay at the moon that bathed the desert, and this third man knew loneliness and was not ashamed to cry."

He smiled understandingly at their puzzlement, and his smile told them to be patient.

"Once upon a time Man sat on a rock as gray and as old as the Earth and stared without hindrance at the source of his birth. Then he searched the vastness of the desert, the prairie, the sea . . . and Lord! how he cried because he was so young and knew then how unready he was to leave his home and make his way in the world. So he returned

home, and grew, and learned, and . . .”

He shrugged.

The chairs were immobile; the light was unceasing. The faces were gone. The house became chilled and he shook himself to find warmth.

“Are parables so far out of style?” he asked the room. “Or am I?”

He slumped and leaned heavily against the chair until his legs straightened and permitted him to stand upright. Anger again convinced him he was right. He looked at his wristwatch and set himself.

“The time has come, the walrus said.”

Long legs, longer strides carried him unerringly through the maze of tables and chairs. The telephone booth gleamed polished and smooth. A touch of his hand and the door slid open silently. He dialed, then prayed. There was a staccato hum cut off only seconds after it had begun.

“The President, please,” he said to a woman’s familiar voice. “This is Galen Summers.”

He was proud of the firmness felt nowhere, but so evident in his voice. He waited without looking away from the dial, without counting or drumming or tapping his foot impatiently. And froze when the President, without introduction, came on the line.

“Galen, I haven’t heard from you in a long time. How are you?”

“Doing just fine, Will. I’ve been sitting here thinking and . . . Will, I just had to call. It’s more im-

portant than you’ll ever know.” He began to feel giddy and gripped the receiver more tightly. “If you’re lucky, your biographer will probably take a whole chapter for this one call alone.”

The President laughed politely, friendly but not warm. “Galen, we’ve been over this before. I’m sorry, but you’re too late. They’ve already gone.”

The old man looked at his watch, too surprised to protest. “When?”

“Half an hour ago.”

An insistent, barely felt throbbing pulsed near the back of his head; a once-famous-in-the-past tic briefly blinded his right eye. “How many?” he asked in a whisper he did not recognize.

“Fourteen.”

“Even up?”

“Seven and seven, Galen.”

“Safe. Are they safe, Will? Will they make it? Are the domes big enough? Can they move around? Can they . . . can they be alone?”

“Now you know better than that. You, of all people, should know.”

“Yes. Well. Congratulations, Will.”

“Liar.”

“Yes. Yes, I guess I am.”

“Well, Galen, pressures of office and all that. I’ll be talking to you.”

“No,” he said, “No, I don’t think so.”

When he stepped out of the booth there was only the silence—sponged by the gray carpet, suctioned by the blackness beyond the hooded globes. There was no seeing then and he stumbled into a chair, grab-

bing an arm to keep himself from falling.

"... of the locomotive far-off on a prairie, and he knew loneliness..."

He stumbled again and a table laden with books tipped against a chair.

"... nothing, nothing at all but nothing. You build a home on a mountain, my friends, and learn what nothing..."

He knelt and raised a fist in exasperation.

"... the next President of the United States—yes, even of the Moon—the man who will lead..."

Eventually the words penetrated and deafened him, and in a manic frenzy he pounded the chairs from a symphony of cheers to silence. His hair fell and was forgotten, his tie askew and forgotten, his vest buttoned half-way up until the fabric ripped and hung open—forgotten. He hurried to the hall but stopped when he saw the small, getting smaller, door at the far end. His portraits, his clippings were hidden in a haze of shadow and he turned away. With a vicious twist of square dial he plunged the room, the house into darkness.

The rear wall was covered by a waterfall of soft blue draperies. Without need of searching for support or avoiding obstacles he moved to the satin cloth's center and tapped the floor with his heel. Silence again, even as the draperies swung wide and the room became nothing as the glass wall opened

onto nothing.

Below was a valley, but he never saw it in sunlight; left and right were mountains, but he only saw black holes in the sky.

He relaxed, pushed aside the annoying call to the President and wondered if the seven and seven would return to build fortresses like his.

"It makes no sense at all," he said. "No sense at all. It really wouldn't have been too difficult to listen, would it?" He laughed and felt better, stronger in the blackness that buoyed him into a drifting that would end only at dawn on a cot in an alcove where he slept during the day.

He thought of the twenty-eight months and looked with pity at the weak imitation of the stars he knew.

He imagined he heard a fog horn, a locomotive, a coyote; he shook his head and was saddened.

Maybe next time they'll listen, he thought when he saw the moon and dreamed past dreams. But then again, maybe it will be too late, and they'll go on. And on. And on again. And where will all the lonely people go then?

"'Twas brillig," he said.

The moon was full.

—C. L. GRANT



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The Stone (Cont. from page 17)

the mantel Cissy distributed copies of the pamphlet issued by RBR, Radical Black Revival, which they were currently using as a textbook. The pamphlets were numbered because they were precious. One couldn't buy them any more.

Stumbling a little, she read aloud the paragraph at which they had stopped last time.

"Whereas Sicilian peasants, whose brutal Mafia-dominated culture has ruined their own homeland and who have no less tenuous connection with Britain than the fact that both islands were ruled by Norman bandits some nine centuries ago, are permitted to go and come as they please, blacks from the Commonwealth to whom the British owe an incalculable debt are barred from the nation that grew fat by sucking their ancestors' blood, or if by some miracle they do achieve entry are constantly at risk of being deported."

Valentine interrupted her with a gesture. "Now you all done like I said? You all bought different papers and marked up bits that prove the truth of what the man says there?"

They had, and one by one they read out what they had found. Brooding, he sat and tried to listen, but found he was hearing more clearly the renewed coughs of his half-white son.

III

BROTHER BRADSHAW was in California. His home overlooked a

magnificent vista, clear down a long valley, over the silvery mist shrouding Los Angeles, and out to sea. It had been bought before his conversion, when he was one of the world's highest-paid TV stars. If anything, he was more handsome now than he had been at the height of his career; a touch of grey at his temples added distinction, and a little more weight conveyed an impression of trustworthy maturity.

In the old days, the wall of this huge room which currently was decorated with pictures of him chatting to the Pope, the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, and a great many Just Plain Folks who had Seen the Light because of him, had been covered with a montage of photos showing him in very different postures and many fewer clothes.

"But I don't want to go to England!" he kept insisting, in a voice which annoyance had heightened from its usual resonant baritone towards a querulous tenor. "Don't I have enough to do over here? What with nearly three hundred murders in Greater Los Angeles last month . . . !"

"But this invitation is personal from Lady Washgrave," Don Gebhart insisted. He had said it all before, but he had been a professional evangelist himself until he took over the management of Brother—formerly Bob—Bradshaw, so he was well used to saying the same thing over and over with equal conviction every time. "You know how much weight she

swings. Her Campaign Against Moral Pollution has a hundred fifty local chapters. A cabinet minister regularly speaks at her meetings, this guy Charkall-Phelps. And she's batting one-oh-oh in her drive to clean up literature and TV. It's three years since she last had an obscenity verdict overturned on appeal. Nobody monkeys with Lady Washgrave!"

"I know!" Bradshaw barked. "I know!"

"So why won't you accept?" Gebart pressed.

Bradshaw didn't answer.

"Listen, Bob," Gebhart said at last. "You never knew me to give you bum advice, did you? Well, what I'm saying is this. You join in her New Year's Crusade, and you'll be on the map for good and all. It would make you—well, it would make you the Billy Graham of the nineteen-eighties!"

More silence. Eventually, with dreadful reluctance, — Bradshaw sketched a nod.

"Great!" Gebhart exclaimed. "I'll call her right away—I guess the time is okay in England now—and explain how you want to spend Christmas with your folks, of course, but you'll be right there on December 28th ready to join in her grand crusade!"

"DAMN," MUTTERED Lance-Corporal Dennis Stevens after they had toured the block for the third time. "Nothing else for it, then. You'll have to double-park while I go in alone."

"What else have I been telling you for the past half-hour?" his driver sighed. "Look, lance, the busies aren't going to give *us* a ticket, are they?"

"I suppose not," Stevens admitted, reaching into the back seat of the olive-drab Army car for the cardboard roll containing the posters he was scheduled to deliver at this particular Employment Exchange. How to explain the reason for his unwillingness to enter by himself?

In fact it was very simple. He knew this drab, forbidding building. It was right on his own home patch. He couldn't count how many hours he had wasted waiting here for the chance of work that never materialised, or to claim from grudging clerks the benefit money due to him by law.

So he might very well run into some of his mates here.

And while there was a lot to be said for joining the Army in times of high unemployment—security, technical training, the chance of travel, plenty of sport and all the rest of it, which had tempted him when he grew bored beyond endurance and certainly had been provided as promised—if it were true, as the headlines on today's *Daily Mirror* claimed, that they were going to send troops to Glasgow and drive the men who'd been on strike these past nine weeks back to work at gunpoint . . . Well, those old mates of his weren't likely to make a soldier very welcome, were they?

"Get a move on, lancel!" the driver pleaded.

"Okay, okay!" Tucking the cardboard tube under his arm like a swagger-stick, he crossed the sidewalk with affected boldness, thinking about what the papers had said.

—Never paid too much attention to that old-fashioned stick-in-the-mud I have for a father. But I do believe he's working right to say the power to strike is precious. What else are working folk to do if they can't get a decent wage? Bloody fools in Parliament! What do they want, another Ireland on their hands?

As it turned out, he'd worried needlessly; the only person who recognised him was the clerk who had to sign for the recruiting posters, and he offered congratulations on putting up a stripe, having done some Army time himself.

—Thank goodness!

PROFESSOR WILFRED KNELLER stood gazing down from the window of his office at the sluggish traffic in the street below. He was Director of the Gull-Grant Research Institute, which occupied the top floor of a four-storey block on the eastern edge of Soho, premises donated by its founder who had been a tobacco millionaire with a guilty conscience.

At the time of his appointment eight years ago this had been a lively district, maintaining Soho's long-standing reputation as a centre of night-life—and, of course, pro-

stitution. The recession, however, had taken its toll, and from here he could count half a dozen "To Let" signs without craning his neck, testimony to the bankruptcy of restaurants, clubs and borderline pornography shops.

—How things have changed!

Moreover, during the night, a team of godhead flyposters had been by, and every wall and window in sight was decorated with stickers repeating their current slogan: PUT CHRIST BACK IN YOUR CHRISTMAS!

—That is, apart from the windows that they smashed . . . I wonder how many proprietors went broke because they couldn't afford to insure their plate-glass after the godheads moved in.

"Morning, Wilfred," a voice said from behind him.

"Morning," he grunted in reply. He knew without looking that the speaker was Dr. Arthur Randolph, a portly man in his forties—ten years his junior—who, like himself, had been with the Institute since its foundation and who headed one of the two departments it was divided into. Officially his was called Biological, while his colleague Maurice Post's was Organochemical; in practice, particularly since the inception of the vc project, they worked in double harness, sharing funds, lab facilities and even staff.

—Natural enough. How could you draw a line between living and non-living where vc is involved?

"Admiring the street decorations, are you?" Randolph went on, walking across the room to join

him. "Makes me think of something Maurice once said to me. Maybe to you too, of course."

"What?"

"Oh, he was wondering what society would have been like if we'd socialised cannabis instead of dangerous drugs like alcohol and religion." Randolph chuckled.

Kneller echoed him, but the sound rang hollow, and after a pause Randolph added, "I—uh—I don't suppose there's been any news of him, has there?"

Kneller shook his head. "Arthur, I really do feel we should notify the police; you know. After all, he's been missing since Monday, without a word of explanation or apology."

"I told you before," Randolph said. "If you do that, you risk losing him completely. I can't imagine him being overjoyed, can you, if the police come hunting for him and all he's done is go off quietly by himself to think for a while?"

"You've said that before," Kneller countered stubbornly. "The more time goes by, the less I believe you. It simply isn't *like* Maurice to vanish this way. And nobody knows what's become of him. His landlady hasn't seen hide or hair of him, he hasn't been in touch with his sister at Folkestone, nor with any of his professional colleagues—I mean apart from us. And he doesn't seem to have any private friends to speak of, and he doesn't belong to a church, and . . . I don't see any alternative,

really I don't." He tugged at his beard. It was grizzled, and out of style now that razor-sales were back to their previous peak, and several people had said it made him look older than his years. But he had worn it since his mid-twenties, and did not feel inclined to abandon it after more than a quarter-century.

Turning to his desk and gesturing for Randolph to sit down, he pursued, "Tell me candidly, Arthur. Has Maurice done or said anything recently to indicate he might have been—well—overworking?"

With a wave of his hand to acknowledge the tactful equivalent of "had a nervous breakdown", Randolph answered, "I wouldn't have said so. He's always been a funny sort of person, like most confirmed bachelors: a bit irritable, a bit unpredictable . . . Of course, lately he has been very upset about the state of the world. But isn't everybody who bothers to pay attention?"

Kneller gave a wry grimace at that. "I know what you mean! Every damned day the news seems to get worse, doesn't it? You saw that they found a poor devil of a Pakistani beaten to death in a park in Birmingham?"

"I did indeed. And what's more I noticed it in the 'News in Brief' column. We're in a hell of a mess, aren't we, when something like that doesn't make headlines on the front page? But it's not the crimes of violence that scare me. I mean, not the

small crimes of violence. I'm worried about the big ones. The kind that could stem from this crisis in Italy, for example."

Kneller shrugged. "What do you expect in a country where it's practically a matter of honour to lie about your income and avoid paying tax? Small wonder they're going broke!"

"That's only the half of it. When the Italians signed the Treaty of Rome they expected to be a net food-exporting country. Within a few years they'd become net importers. So of course they're being bled white by the subsidies given to inefficient farmers in other countries. So are we, come to that. If they do decide to try and pull Italy out of the Common Market, close their frontiers and re-impose protective tariffs . . . Well, the Treaty of Rome is meant to be irrevocable, isn't it?"

"Was it Maurice who sold that line of argument to you?" Kneller demanded.

Randolph looked faintly surprised. "Come to think of it, it must have been. A week or two ago. Why, was he talking about it to you?"

"He did say something about the third world war being more likely to start that way than by a clash between East and West; or rich and poor. But that's not quite the point. I recall you as having been a fervent pro-Market man ever since we first met."

"Well, I still am!" Randolph declared with a hint of belligerence.

"But if the system is this badly mis-managed . . . I do have to confess, though, that the way Maurice put his case made me see things in a different light. But why are you making such a meal of this? That's always been Maurice's special talent: shedding a different light on things."

"I'm not sure," Kneller admitted. "It's just that at the edge of my mind there's something . . . No, I can't pin it down."

"Well, if you really are worried about Maurice," Randolph said, "there's one thing you could do. You're wrong to say we don't know about any of his private friends. Surely his GP is a friend, too. Weren't they at school together?"

Kneller snapped his fingers. "Yes, of course! I should have thought of that before. Isn't his name . . . Hamilton? No, Campbell, that's it. And his address is bound to be on Maurice's file. I'll send for it."

Hand outstretched towards his desk intercom, he checked. "Arthur, this will probably sound ridiculous, but . . . Look, describe to me what, in your view, Maurice expects VC to do if and when we decide it's safe to administer it to a human subject."

"What?" Randolph stared blankly at him. "Why, you know as well as I do."

"I think I do." Kneller was suddenly very grave. "The stuff's volatile, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course. Or rather, not the stuff itself, but the supportive

medium we keep it in. Why?"

"Would it be possible to determine whether there's been a stock loss?"

"A stock loss?" Randolph echoed in perplexity. "Lord, on the molecular level? The quantities we're working with are so damned small! Not a chance."

"Very well, then. Who issues test-samples to the lab technicians and the post-grads—you or Maurice?"

"Maurice. Nine times out of ten at any rate."

"In other words, he's the person who most often opens the sealed vats." Kneller leaned forward earnestly. "And could not the hoped-for effect of VC be described as enabling one to cast fresh light on every single kind of subject?"

There was dead silence for a moment. Randolph turned pale.

"If you mean what I think you mean—"

"You know damned well what I mean!"

"Then you had better get hold of his doctor. Right away!"

DOWN A HALF-DESERTED side-street in Kentish Town marched a pair of godheads, one a few years older than the other.

"Come to Jesus! Come and be saved!"

It was a good area to pick up converts, this, especially in winter. The original inhabitants had been cleared out to make room for a motorway which in fact had not been extended this far. Consequently many of the houses were intact ex-

cept that their doors had been nailed up and their windows were blocked with corrugated iron and neglect had dug holes in every other roof.

Down-and-outs congregated here now, some of them former residents driven to despair because they had not been rehoused, some simply unemployed, some outright social misfits like meths-drinkers and even a few of the remaining hard-drug addicts. Only four or five sources of illegal supply survived in London, and one of those was a little north of here, a mile or two.

All of a sudden the younger of the godheads gave a stifled cry, and his companion hastened to see what he had found.

Poking out from behind a stub of wall, partly covered by the snow which was still sifting down although more lightly than an hour before, yet absolutely unmistakable: a pair of human legs.

"What—what shall we do?" the younger godhead whimpered, having to lean on his plastic cross for support. "Should we tell the police?"

The older considered for a moment, and pronounced, "No, I don't think so. Aren't we told to let the dead bury their dead? And the last thing we want is to get mixed up in a police investigation. It would seriously hamper our work."

"I—I suppose you're right," the younger admitted, and added in surprise: "But what are you doing?"

The other had bent over the

corpse and after scraping snow away with the end of his cross was fumbling with gloved fingers inside the coat it wore.

"Just checking to see whether he was carrying any—ah—worldly goods," was his answer. "We could make better use of them now than he can. . . . No, nothing. No wallet, no billfold, just a comb and some keys and—what's this? Oh, only a letter. What a shame. Okay, let's move on. And pray the snow lasts long enough to cover our footprints."

IV

"**L**AY HIM DOWN THERE, nurse," Dr. Hector Campbell instructed as he led the way into the white-walled casualty examination room adjacent to his office at the North-West London General Clinic. He had to speak loudly. Not only was it blood-transfusion day—which meant that the pride of the haematological department was in operation, the continuous-throughput plasma centrifuge—but the friend who had brought in this Jewish-looking man with the cut head was keeping up a nonstop flow of excuses.

"I had no shoes on, you see, and there was snow on the road, so by the time I'd gone back for my slippers they'd. . . ."

But Hector forgot about him the instant he opened the office door. He froze, muttering an oath.

"Is something wrong?" demanded the girl who was helping

the casualty on to the examination couch: "Nurse Diana Rouse" according to the name-badge pinned on her stiff apron.

"Yes! This is wrong!" Furious, Hector advanced into the office. Books had been pulled down from every shelf and lay randomly on the floor, while an attempt had been made to start a fire in a metal waste-bin. Grimacing his fingers with charred paper, he retrieved some of the less completely burned sheets and discovered just what he might have expected: pictures of the genital organs, descriptions of the sexual act.

"Oh, no!" the nurse exclaimed from the doorway. "Who could have done such a dreadful thing?"

"I could make a few guesses," Hector grunted. "What kind of people set themselves up as arbiters of what shall and what shall not appear in print? Now I'll have to send for the police, I suppose. . . . Oh, get on with cleaning up that man's head. And tell his friend to wait outside!"

On the point of reaching for the phone, he hesitated before deciding that the intruders were unlikely to have touched it and hence he would not be spoiling any prints, and during his hesitation it rang. He snatched it up.

"Dr. Campbell? This is Professor Kneller at the Gull-Grant Research Institute. I believe Maurice Post is a patient of yours, and we're very anxious to get in touch with him—"

"Professor, I haven't seen Maurice since a week ago!" Hector

broke in. "And I don't have time to talk now. I just came into my office, and it's been vandalised. Looks like godhead work."

"Oh." A pause. "Well, I won't keep you, then, but if you do hear anything from Maurice—"

"Yes, of course! Goodbye!"

THE MAGAZINES PROVIDED in the waiting-area for patients and their friends were approved and donated, according to a rubber stamp on each, by the Campaign Against Moral Pollution, and hence predictably were dull as ditchwater. Malcolm recalled that at about the same time as he had lost his job there had been a rash of letters to the press, master-minded no doubt by Lady Washgrave, saying how horrified parents had been to find *Playboy* or *Penthouse* when taking their children to see a doctor.

—The devils. When you think of how *they* pervert kids . . . !

In response to pressure from an influential group of parents the headmaster of the school at which Malcolm had been a popular and respected teacher had invited a speaker from the Campaign to address the morning assembly. The man had declared, with some justification, that the world was going to hell in a handbasket, and then gone on to claim that the only solution lay in returning to the Good Old Moral Values of the glorious past.

Unable to stand any more, Malcolm had demanded why, if those values were so marvellous,

the people who paid lip-service to them had involved mankind in two world wars with all their accoutrements from poison gas to atom-bombs. Taking their cue from him, his class had burst out laughing, and the laughter spread, and the visitor was prevented from completing his talk.

Whereupon, the next day, the headlines, bold and black: TEACHER "CORRUPTING CHILDREN," PARENTS CLAIM. And, after the lapse of a week: "ATHEIST TEACHER" SACKED AFTER ROW.

There had been a petition raised by his pupils for his reinstatement, and even now, a year later, some of them occasionally called on him. But if they were found out their parents created hell, so the visits were growing fewer.

—And what do those smug clerks at the Employment Exchange have to say to me through their glass screens? Armour-glass, naturally, because now and then somebody loses his temper at the way they sneer from the security of their Civil Service posts. Why, that I'd make twice as much at a factory bench in Germany! But I don't want that. I want the job I'm trained for, the one I'm good at. Besides, the Germans have started to send their *Gastarbeiter* home to Yugoslavia and Greece and Spain, and some of them are being forced to go.

It had been in the news a few days ago, not prominent.

—Come to think of it, this hospital reminds me of the Em-

ployment Exchange. All these people sitting in rows with hopeless looks on their faces . . . But that's wrong. It's a place of healing. It should be a happy place. It should be as splendid as a great cathedral, built of the most magnificent materials and lavish with the masterwork of fine artists. Instead, look at it. Barely ten years old, and falling apart already. Thrown up as cheaply as possible, and you can tell just by looking at the staff they don't enjoy working here. Christ, I'm glad I'm only visiting!

He wondered in passing whether anybody had explained to these people waiting that the delay was due to the police being called to the doctor's vandalised office. Probably not.

—I hope I'm not heading for another bout of suicidal depression like yesterday's. If I hadn't run across that guy Morris . . .

He had been to a private school a few miles north of London to be interviewed for a job he had seen advertised, and had known the moment he got there that he was having his time wasted, perhaps deliberately, for the place was plastered with Moral Pollution stickers. On the way home he had felt he must have a drink, despite the prohibitive price of liquor, so he had wandered at random into a pub, and . . .

—Fantastic fellow, that Morris. Must have an amazing memory for faces. I mean, to have recognised me from those lousy pictures that appeared in the papers. But it was

so reassuring when he asked how I was getting on. The mere fact that someone I'd never met should care about me . . . !

The conversation had taken off like a rocket, and lasted long past the point at which he should have gone home to meet Ruth, with whom he had a date.

—But it was such fun talking to him!

For more than three hours they had chatted away—and gone on drinking, mostly at Morris's expense because as usual Malcolm was broke. They had reviewed the state of the world, the government's incompetence, the hypocrisy of the Moral Polluters, all the subjects Malcolm felt most strongly about . . . plus one other, new to him, which Morris had reverted to several times.

—Can it really be on the cards that we'll see a military coup in Italy, like the Greek one? And that a junta of generals would try and pull them out of the Common Market?

Morris had predicted that, and he'd talked about a certain Marshal Dalessandro whom Malcolm had never heard of, and one way and another he had painted a dreadfully gloomy picture of the immediate future. He had said in so many words, "Like the First and the Second, the Third World War is going to start right here in Europe."

—And I said, "Do you really think there's no hope for us at all?" And he looked at me for a bit, with

that odd quizzical expression, and then he produced that little phial of capsules, tiny little yellow things no bigger than rice-grains, and said, "This may be the answer. I hope it is." And I said . . . God, I must have been drunk by then! I said, "If that's the case, I'd like some." And he said, "Okay, here you are. You deserve it more than most people." And like a crazy fool I took it!

In the rush to bring Billy, bleeding rivers, to the clinic (by taxi, and was he going to refund the fare? It had swallowed three pounds from Malcolm's scanty weekly budget), he had had no time to reflect on that capsule and its possible side-effects. But there was that strange point Ruth had raised: how had he known that *four* godheads were crossing the street when deep snow muffled their tread?

Briefly, however, he was distracted from worrying about that. The door of the casualty examination room was fractionally ajar, and through it drifted a snatch of conversation: Nurse Rouse and Dr Campbell. He listened, hoping to catch some clue as to what had become of Billy.

"Thank goodness they've gone!" From the nurse. "We'll never get through the morning schedule at this rate."

"Don't I know it! Jesus, if only . . . Why, what's wrong?"

Stiffly: "I don't like to hear the Name taken in vain."

"Oh, no. Not you too! Since when have you been on the side of

the book-burners, the self-appointed censors, the petty street-corner dictators?"

"You have no proof!"

"Proof? I've proved that a gang of them invaded the wards yesterday evening at what should have been the patients' bedtime and marched around singing and begging. Everybody was furious, but there wasn't anything they dared do. You know how they hit back if you cross them."

"Godheads aren't like that! They're ordinary decent people trying to put some proper standards back into our lives."

"You can say that, after seeing what they did to Mr Cohen?"

"You heard what his friend said—he picked a quarrel deliberately!"

"So what became of the injunction to turn the other cheek?"

—Good question!

In the privacy of his head, Malcolm applauded the doctor's argument.

But, a moment later, Campbell wearily changed the subject. "Speaking of Cohen, what did you do with him?"

"Oh . . . Told him to lie down until we've seen the X-rays. But I don't think he's seriously hurt. More shocked than anything."

"Yes, if there's nothing on the plates tell him to go home, not to go to work until tomorrow, come back if he feels at all giddy or unwell. Is his friend still here?"

"I think so. Perhaps if he can wait until the X-rays are ready he

can see Mr. Cohen safely home. I don't think we could possibly spare an ambulance."

RISING FRETFULLY, in need of a toilet, Malcolm heard what he had already heard when Nurse Rouse repeated it, and asked directions to a men's room. She sent him down a long echoing corridor where there was a constant to-ing and fro-ing of staff and patients.

—Poor woman! Shoulders uneven like that . . . Must have broken a collarbone when she was a kid, and it was neglected or badly set. And him, too, the man in the shabby jacket: the way he holds his arms over his belly . . . Ulcer. Yes, an ulcer.

And came close to stopping dead in his tracks as he realised:

—I don't know these people. I never had any training in medicine. So how the hell . . . ? Of course. I've seen the same before, haven't I? Carter-Craig who had to retire early from the first school I taught at: he used to hold his arms that way when his ulcer was plaguing him. And that boy I was at school with myself, Freddie Grice. His shoulders were uneven and when he grew up he must have come to look pretty much like that woman. Funny I should think of him, though. Must be the first time in—what?—fifteen years.

And, as he discovered he was able to make similar rational guesses about the other patients he passed, waiting for medicine to be issued over a dispensary counter, he was

momentarily disturbed.

—Could this have something to do with the VC Morris gave me? I mean, I don't usually think like this, don't usually pay so much attention to everybody I see . . . Still, if the main result of taking VC is to increase your empathy, that can definitely not be bad. The world's terribly short of it. Morris and I were agreeing on that last night.

Then his puzzlement was chased away by something else as he drew level with the main entrance foyer of the building. On arriving with Billy he had spotted a separate casualty entrance, so he had not come in this way. Here now was a fat cheerful woman handing to a nurse seated at a table a little blue chit bearing the symbol of the National Blood Transfusion Service, and saying as she did so, "Haven't done this for years, you know! If I'd realised, I'd have come along sooner. Makes a bit extra for Christmas like, don't it?"

And the girl was exchanging the blue voucher for a five-pound note.

He had known there was a blood-donation session in progress; a sign at the casualty entrance informed would-be donors that they had come to the wrong door. But . . .

Catching sight of him, the seated nurse looked a question.

"Since when have they been paying for blood in this country?" he demanded.

"Oh, it's a new idea," the nurse answered. "Seems not enough people will give blood if they don't.

We were having to buy plasma from abroad. So they said to start paying." She pulled a face. "Can't say I fancy the look of some of the people it pulls in, I must admit!"

"Good grief," Malcolm said inadequately. "Ah . . . how much?"

"Oh, five pounds a pint. I mean half-liter."

THE IDEA HAUNTED HIM all the time he was in the toilet, and finally he gave in.

After all, there was something so horribly appropriate about it.

"FRY, MALCOLM COLIN . . . Do you happen to know your group, Mr. Fry? No? You should, you know. Everybody should. But testing for that will only take a moment . . . Ah, you're O positive, the commonest group. So that will probably go straight to the plasma centrifuge. But don't worry, we'll pay you anyhow! There's always a great demand for plasma over Christmas: road accidents, kids cutting themselves on knives they've just been given, drunken housewives getting burned as they take the turkey out of the oven . . . Sit over there, please, and wait until the nurse says she's ready."

V

—SO WHAT WAS ALL THAT about Maurice Post?

By dint of skimming (he admitted it to himself) on his least-urgent patients, Hector Campbell had

caught up on the day's list by his regular quitting-time. Being so harried, though, he was already driving out of the clinic's car-park before he recollected the mysterious phone-call from Kneller.

—But he works at Gull-Grant. Why in the world should the director be "anxious to get in touch with him"?

He hesitated. Then, with sudden decision, he turned right instead of left as usual towards his home. Maurice lived on the edge of Hampstead, barely a mile north of here. It would take only ten minutes to go ring his bell and ask if he would like a pre-Christmas drink, and if he were not in little time would have been wasted.

—But it's all very strange!

Though he and Maurice had been at school together, Maurice was the older by three years, so only membership of the school's Science Hobby Club had brought them into regular contact. There had been a lapse of a decade when they completely drifted apart. Coincidentally, however, Maurice's former doctor had retired at the time he moved to Hampstead, and on learning that his new address was in the catchment area of the clinic where Hector worked, he had opted to continue with National Health treatment rather than the private care the government would have preferred someone in his position to choose. Since then, he and Hector had met a dozen times a year, at parties, at the latter's home, or for a spur-of-the-moment

drink together.

Hector was not entirely clear about the nature of Maurice's work at the Gull-Grant Institute. Though he had taken a course in biochemistry as part of his medical training, he was baffled by the obscure language of the scientific papers from internationally respected journals which Maurice now and then showed him with shy pride. He had, however, gathered that his old friend was regarded as a leading authority on the structure of complex organic molecules, and had developed valuable new methods of handling viruses *in vitro*.

—And his boss doesn't know where he is? Ridiculous!

They had last met the previous week, when Hector had been resigned to a dull evening of baby-minding because his wife was attending a charitable committee-meeting. Maurice had invited himself over, and they had passed a pleasant couple of hours chatting. Memory replayed fragments of the conversation, like bad tape full of wow.

“Can there have been a gloomier Christmas than this since 1938? How many people out of work—two million, isn't it? And this crisis brewing in Italy, and the government making all these threats about jailing strikers, which I believe a lot more readily than most of their promises! And all the time inflation running wild: people walking because they can't afford bus-fare, the shops full of goods

and nobody buying anything even though it's nearly Christmastime, just wandering around and staring with those pitiful looks of envy . . . You've seen 'em!”

—Pleasant? No, not exactly. We spent too much of the time commiserating about the mess the world is in. But it was a splendid bull-session, anyhow.

At which point in his musing he reached an intersection and slowed to glance left and right despite being on the major road, for although the snow had stopped this area, unfrequented and poverty-stricken, had not been sanded and the streets were slippery. There, in a narrow cul-de-sac where most of the houses were empty and the front yards sprouted boastful signs about impending redevelopment which had never taken place: a police constable, an ambulance rolling to a halt, and—a specially bad sign—a group of a dozen kids and a couple of women clustered together, watching in silence. Plainly they were very poor. His practised eye noted with dismay the symptoms of osteomalacia, nutritional anasarca and what, given the fearful price of fruit and vegetables this winter, could all too easily be scurvy.

—Some child hurt playing a dangerous game in one of those vacant houses?

He jumped out of his car, shivering in the bitter wind, and shouted as he approached the policeman, “I'm a doctor! Anything I can do?”

Carrying a blood-red blanket, the ambulancemen were heading for a drift of snow piled against a stub of broken wall.

"I'm afraid he's past hope, sir," the constable said.

"A tramp dead of exposure?" Hector hazarded.

The policeman lowered his voice. "More like murder, sir, if you ask me."

"Murder!" Hector echoed, more loudly than he intended, and one of the kids overheard, a snot-nosed brat of about ten.

"Yeah! 'Ad 'is 'ead beat in, just like on the telly!"

And crowed with cynical laughter.

"Get out of it, you lot!" the constable shouted, and continued to Hector, "Though I'm afraid he's right. See for yourself."

He pointed, and for Hector the world came to a grinding halt. He heard himself say faintly, "Maurice!"

"You knew him?" the policeman demanded.

"He's—he was—one of my oldest friends! I was on my way to call on him! Oh, this is terrible!" Hector stooped at the corpse's side, and his last faint hope that he might have been mistaken vanished as he looked more closely at the frost-pale features. Swallowing hard, he said, "His name was Post."

"Yes, I found a letter on him with that name," the policeman began, and broke off as, to the accompaniment of a chorus of jeers from the children, a white car with a

flashing blue light on top rounded the corner. "Excuse me, sir. Here comes CID now."

HAVING PERFORMED his rôle as corpse-identifier and relinquished the rest of the grisly task to the experts, Hector stood by feeling numb cold spread up from his soles to match the frozen sensation in his mind. He barely heard what was being said, the consensus that Maurice has been hit very hard with something blunt, that he had probably been killed elsewhere and his body dumped, very likely last night, that it was no use photographing footprints around it because the kids had trampled the snow . . . Yet somehow he could not summon the energy to get back in his car and go home.

And then, unexpectedly, another car roared to a halt and two men emerged, one in his fifties with a grizzled beard, the other plumper and somewhat younger. With a shock, Hector recognised a face he had often seen in scientific magazines Maurice had lent him.

"Professor Kneller!" he shouted.

The bearded man checked, "Who the . . . ?"

"I'm Hector Campbell! Maurice's doctor!" Hurrying over to him.

"Good lord. We spoke on the phone this morning. Well, this is my colleague Arthur Randolph, and . . . You mean it is Maurice that they've found?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Oh my God." Kneller let his

shoulders slump. "Did they find anything on his body?"

"What sort of—?" Hector began, but he was interrupted as the senior police officer at the scene strode to meet them.

"Professor Kneller? I'm Chief Inspector Sawyer. We've had a positive identification from Dr. Campbell here, so—"

"Did you find anything on his body?" Kneller snapped.

Sawyer, startled, blinked rapidly several times. "Well, a few odds and ends. My sergeant's made up a list. Sergeant Epton!" Turning.

And the sergeant brought them a printed form with half a dozen lines of neat writing on it, which Kneller scanned hastily. Passing it to Randolph, he shook his head.

"Have you looked in his wallet? It could have been in there," Randolph said.

"There's no mention of a wallet," Kneller grunted.

"That's not surprising, sir," Sawyer put in. "Either this was, as they say, murder in pursuit of theft, or else someone threw his wallet away to make us think it was."

"It is murder? You're sure of that?"

"There's a vanishingly small chance it might have been an accident. I wouldn't bet money on it, though." Sawyer, sharp-featured and lean, looked grim.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to search this whole area," Kneller said. "Very thoroughly indeed!"

"Looking for what, sir?"

"Probably a container of

capsules, little yellow ones the size of a rice-grain."

Hector took a pace forward. "But that sounds like Inspirogene. I prescribed it for Maurice myself. What makes it so special?"

Sawyer glanced at him. "A drug, doctor?"

"Not the kind you mean," Hector said. "It's for asthma and other allergic complaints. Professor, why in the—?"

Randolph cut him short. "Wilfred, we must search his home. He may have left a note or something."

"Yes, of course. Inspector, we'll have to go there right away. I see his keys were found on him. Bring them along."

Sawyer, clearly disconcerted, answered, "I'm afraid everything from the body will have to go to the forensic people, sir."

"Damn!" Kneller stamped his foot. "Well, if you come to his home with us, can we legally break in?"

"There'd be no need for that," Hector interposed. "His landlady lives downstairs. I'm sure she'll have a key. And she's elderly and almost never goes out."

"Fine! Come along, inspector—but order a search of this site first."

Obstinately Sawyer said, "You'll have to give me a reason!"

"I can't! Not without wasting time! Simply take my word that . . . Well, for one thing, if these kids got hold of what I'm talking about, there'd be hell to pay."

"Sir!" Diffidently from the young constable. "The body did

look as though someone had searched the pockets. And these kids are a rough lot. Wouldn't put it past 'em to . . ." He ended on a shrug. With a sigh, Sawyer gave ground.

"You come too, Campbell," Randolph said. "You knew him and his habits better than us, I imagine. We're likely to need your advice."

"OH, BILLY! THANKS!" gasped Ruth as she ducked into the hallway of Malcolm's home, followed by a blast of freezing air. Setting down the heavy shopping-bag she carried, obviously her last pre-Christmas purchases, she went on, "Are you okay?"

Touching the bandage around his head, Billy answered with a sour grin. "As well as can be expected. They didn't even have to put stitches in."

"Thank goodness for that! Uh—is Malcolm in?"

"I don't think so. I just knocked on his door and got no answer. I passed out when I came home from the clinic, you see, because of the shot they gave me, I guess, and when I woke up a few minutes ago I came down to say thanks, and . . . Mind out, Ruth."

Descending the stairs carrying luggage, embittered Len Shaw, oldest of Malcolm's lodgers. Pushing by, he said, "Merry Christmas!" In a tone suggestive of afterthought.

"Is Malcolm expecting you?" Billy went on.

"Not exactly. I . . . Well, it may sound silly, but I make a point of not seeing him every day."

"And of not having a key to this house," Billy said acutely. "Too much like permanent, hm?"

She gave him a sharp suspicious glance.

"No, Malcolm hasn't been talking about you to me! But . . . Well, I've seen the change you've brought about in him, and I think it's great. You know what a state he was in when I arrived, a month or so after his wife walked out with the kids because he's unemployed. Even if he was just my landlord, he struck me as a nice guy, and I was worried to see him so miserable. And then you showed up, and ever since . . . Say, can I ask a personal question?"

"I won't promise to answer, but go ahead."

"You're single, right? Well—why the hell?"

Ruth bit her lip. "If you must know," she said after a pause, "by accident. Fatal-type."

"Oh! Like—uh—a car-crash killed your fiance?"

"No, a train-crash killed my father. And left my mother crippled. It meant I couldn't go to university, and when she did eventually die . . . Well, it seemed too late for children, and that to me is the reason for being married. But I'm doing okay. I have a steady secure job, because of course I had to have one, and I don't think I was cut out to be a wife."

More luggage being carried down

the stairs: Reggie Brown the dreadfully earnest student of archaeology, helping devout Mary with her bags. More insincere cries of, "Merry Christmas!" And a renewed blast of cold wind down the hallway.

"Are you going away over Christmas?" Billy asked as the door shut.

"Yes, I'm visiting my brother in Kent. What about you?"

Billy shrugged. "Oh, I'll stay home. I don't have any kinfolk in England, you know, and all my friends are around here. Besides, after what happened this morning I don't feel too much inclined to celebrate a Christian feast."

"It was terrible, wasn't it?" Ruth said. "They were like wild beasts! I really thought for a moment they were going to kill you."

"Wouldn't have been the first time a Jew got killed for being Jewish, would it?" Billy grunted. "I've run across them before, you know. Once we caught one of them planting a gas-bomb—I mean a petrol-bomb—in the section of the bookstore where we keep sex-counselling books and medical texts. And there's a clothing store I pass every morning and evening that closed down after they smashed its windows half a dozen times. They'd found out it was catering to gay people. That made me really hate their guts. Not that I could afford the prices the shop was charging, but even so . . ."

"You mean you—?" Ruth began, looking at him with wide eyes, and

broke off. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

Billy spread his hands. "I don't noise it around, but I don't make a secret of it, either. It's the way I am and I feel I'm entitled to live with it."

"Yes. Yes, of course." Ruth hesitated, then turned to pick up her shopping-bag again. "Well, I mainly called in to ask after you, and if Malcolm isn't in—"

From behind the closed door of Malcolm's room came a sudden crash: a plate or saucer smashing.

"But he is in!" Billy exclaimed, and swung around to try the door-handle. Unlocked, the door swung wide.

And there was Malcolm at the breakfast-counter dividing the kitchenette from the rest of the room, very pale and swaying visibly as he tried to kick into a pile the fragments of the plate he had dropped. The light in the room was very low; the radio was playing softly; the TV was on, but not its sound, and everywhere books lay open untidily.

On the breakfast-counter were two bottles of wine: one empty, one newly-opened.

"Hi," Malcolm muttered. "Sorry, Ruth. I heard you come in, but I just didn't feel up to . . . Oh, damn! I'm very drunk, I'm afraid. It seems to help."

"I—uh—I wanted to say merry Christmas before I went away," Ruth said, advancing nervously into the room. "And I brought you a sort of extra present . . ."

"Yes, mackerel." Malcolm closed his eyes, looking infinitely weary. "My favourite. Thank you. But you really shouldn't have, not with the price of fish."

"What?" She stopped dead. "How did you know? I told the fishmonger to wrap it tight in plastic so the smell wouldn't—"

"Oh, I just know!" Malcolm snapped. "I know lots of things! Things I thought I'd forgotten years ago, decades ago!" He pointed vaguely at the wine-bottle. "Here, have a drink, help yourselves. Do you know what's happened?"

Billy said uncertainly, "Malcolm, you look sick!"

"Do you know what's happened?" With sudden rage. "No, of course not! I'll tell you! I was so depressed when I came back from the clinic I thought I'd call up Cathy and it was Doug who answered and he said, 'Who's that?' And I said, 'It's Daddy!' And he said—know what he said?" Clinging to the edge of the breakfast-counter, glaring. "He said, 'No, you're not my daddy any more. Mummy said so. We're going to have a new daddy for a Christmas present.' And then she came on the line herself and said I can't see Doug and Judy over Christmas because this new man of hers is taking them all away somewhere, goodbye!"

"Oh, Malcolm!" Ruth breathed.

"I don't blame you for getting drunk," Billy said.

"It's my own fault, I suppose."

Malcolm sighed. "Never marry a good church-going girl, Billy! They can always find moral justifications for anything they feel like doing, no matter how it hurts other people . . . Not that I have to warn you, I guess, on either count."

Billy gave a sad chuckle.

"I was talking about her to this guy Morris I met in the Hampstead Arms," Malcolm went on. "You know, Ruth—the one who gave me that pill." A yawn fought its way past his self-control.

"You took a pill from someone you met at the Hampstead Arms?" Billy echoed incredulously.

Ruth glanced at him. "Yes, he did—the damned fool! Something called VC. Did you ever hear of it?"

"VC?" Billy pondered a second, shook his head. "No, it doesn't mean anything to me. But the Hampstead Arms does. It's just down the road from where the biggest pusher in London lives, and—"

"I feel so sleepy," Malcolm interrupted. "I'm terribly sorry, but I just can't keep my eyes open any longer and I have to go to bed and . . ." Giddily, he tried to walk around the end of the counter, and before he had taken more than four paces he pitched forward into Billy's arms, mouth ajar and uttering peaceful snores.

VI

MAURICE'S HOME was in one of a line of small red-brick terraced houses which, when they were built in the late nineteenth century, had

barely been considered adequate for one lower-middle-class family. Now they were carved into apartments and even single rooms. Maurice had been lucky and secured a whole floor to himself when the widow of the former owner found herself unable to make ends meet. There were a living-room, a bedroom, a study, plus a bathroom and a tiny kitchen: not lavish accommodation for a world-renowned expert in organochemistry, and far too cramped for the library he had accumulated.

There, propped between a salt-cellar and an egg-cup on the huge brown table that dominated the living-room, was an envelope addressed to Kneller.

He was about to snatch it up when Sawyer said sharply, "Just a moment! Dr. Randolph, what made you suspect he might have left a note?"

The same question had been troubling Hector, who stood by the doorway trying to soothe the landlady; she was half-hysterical at having her home invaded by police, and kept muttering about what a respectable district Hampstead had been before the motorway drew a line of slums across it.

—Right. Since when do murder victims leave notes, like suicides?

"Guesswork!" Randolph snapped. "Pure guesswork!"

And Kneller chimed in, "You mean you won't let me open it?"

"Certainly, sir. But . . ." Sawyer selected a clean knife from a pile of cutlery lying untidy on a side-table;

Maurice had never been a neat housekeeper. "But we don't want to spoil any prints, do we? I mean, if Dr. Post himself didn't write that note—"

"It's his writing on the envelope," Kneller insisted. "Isn't it, Campbell?"

Hector nodded. It was spiky and very individual.

"Even so, I'd be obliged if you'd keep your gloves on, and I'll take charge of the envelope." Sawyer spoke with finality. Yielding, Kneller used the knife, and extracted a single close-typed sheet which he studied with a frown before passing it to Randolph.

There was a period of silence. During it Hector could think only of how cold the room was.

Eventually Randolph said, "Campbell, I gather you saw Maurice last Friday evening, right? That must have been a few hours after we last saw him at the Institute. We were expecting him on Monday as usual and he didn't turn up. Did he seem in any way—well—disturbed?"

"May I?" Sawyer said, holding out his hand for the note. Randolph surrendered it to him.

"Won't mean much to you! Barely means anything to me. But read it by all means. Well, Campbell?"

"Not disturbed," Hector said slowly. "Perhaps . . . agitated? He gave the impression that he had a lot on his mind."

"What did you talk about?" Kneller demanded.

"Oh . . . The state of the world!"

"But did he stress anything in particular?"

Puzzled, Hector cast his mind back. He said after a moment, "I think we spent most of the time wondering whether it would ever be possible for human beings to organise their affairs properly. I recall that he said something . . . Just a moment, let me get this right. Yes! I recall he asked whether, in my view, someone who had it in his power to change human nature ought to do so, on the grounds that while you couldn't tell whether it would be a change for the better it was hard to believe it would be for the worse. He'd been going on about this bee he had in his bonnet about a third world war breaking out next year."

Kneller whistled between his teeth. "You took him seriously, did you?"

"Well . . ." Hector hesitated. "I'm not sure. We drank rather a lot that evening, you see. But I mention it because it was a point he kept coming back to, several times."

"That settles it," Randolph said with decision. "I'm convinced, Wilfred, even if you're not. Inspector, you'll have to have this place searched properly."

"Looking for Inspirogene capsules?" Hector snapped. He felt confused and adrift, as though he had missed the point of this argument through a momentary lapse of concentration.

"Yes, but not containing Inspirogene any longer," Kneller said, almost shamefaced. "We—uh—we went over Maurice's office today, after lunch. It had been closed up since he left a week ago, of course. And we found two or three little yellow capsules broken at the bottom of a wastebin, as though someone had emptied the contents out and tried to refill them. And . . . Well, that would have been an ideal means of abstracting a few milligrams from the lab."

"A few milligrams of what?" Hector roared, and fractionally out of synch Sawyer echoed him.

"We'll have to tell them," Randolph said to Kneller. "Would you rather leave it to me? But you can't ask the police to work in the dark, you know."

"Oh, go ahead," Kneller muttered.

"Very well." Randolph faced Hector and Sawyer and set his shoulders back. "To the best of our knowledge this is the first that anyone outside the Gull-Grant Institute has heard about the VC project. VC is the—the 'stuff' referred to in Maurice's note."

Reminded of it, Hector mutely sought Sawyer's permission to read it too. The detective ceded it with a shrug, his expression implying that help from any quarter would be welcome, and while Randolph talked on Hector scanned the thirty-odd lines it bore. There were many corrections and x-ings-out, as though Maurice had been either a

very poor typist or under immense emotional strain. Hector suspected the latter. The text was almost incomprehensible. He saw a shadow of their conversation last Friday in references to "the world relapsing into its old evil ways" and "our missed opportunity to let people use their known potential", and above all to "that deliberate encouragement of selective inattention which the guilty among us employ to save themselves from being brought to book." At one stage Maurice had spoken with uncharacteristic fury about people who, in his opinion, consciously misused their intellectual gifts in order to delude the less intelligent, claiming in particular that while it was natural enough for men to fight in defence of their homes and families, it was a wholly artificial process which led them to sacrifice their lives in defence of leaders who themselves would never risk exposure on the firing-line because they were too sensible.

—Not exactly news. He did argue it very well, though . . .

These passages, however, were islands of clarity in a muddle of jargon, parasyntaxis, and abominable straining after pointless puns.

—Poor Maurice! How could he have drifted over the borderline of sanity? He seemed rational enough when I last saw him. And what could he have done to make somebody kill him?

Hector composed himself to try and understand what Randolph was

saying, but was little the wiser when the explanation was at its end.

"DR. CAMPBELL WILL KNOW some of this already, but I'll fill you in on the background, inspector. Professor Kneller and I joined the Institute when it was founded eight years ago, and Dr Post a few months later. Our charter says that we're to undertake research in biology and organic chemistry without regard to eventual commercial exploitation. In fact we haven't managed to live up to that ideal. What looked like more than adequate funding when Sir Hugh Gull-Grant drafted his will has been eroded by inflation and we have sometimes had to supplement our budget by accepting contracts from outside. But we've always had at least one absolutely pure research project going, and that's the one we started with, an attempt to create a replicating molecule not derived from pre-existent living material."

"But—" Hector began. Randolph glanced at him.

"You were going to say we didn't pioneer that? Quite right. We were beaten to it by Sakulin and his group in Canada. In fact there's now a whole new biology of synthetic replicants, although hardly any practical applications have been found for them so far.

"When Sakulin announced his results, naturally we were terribly disappointed—except for Maurice. In an upsidedown way he was almost pleased. Because, you see, we'd been attacking the problem by

an entirely different route, and it had led Maurice to something that as far as we know is still unique. The moment he indicated the implications to us, we became quite as excited as we had been miserable an hour before."

Sawyer's strained face showed he was making a gallant attempt to keep in touch, but wasn't convinced he was succeeding.

Randolph rubbed his chin. "To start with, you presumably know that the way we perceive the world is a function of a series of electrochemical interactions. The most dramatic proof lies in the fact that our consciousness can be disturbed even by such a small thing as a blow, more violently by—say—alcohol, and very severely indeed by a high fever or a powerful drug. Yes? Moreover what we regard as a normal mental state can often be chemically restored, as for example by a tranquilliser."

There were nods: doubtful from Sawyer, urgent from Hector, automatic from the landlady who still stood ignored in the doorway.

"Moreover it's known that we do not ordinarily operate at maximum potential. Direct stimulation of the brain with tiny electrodes can bring back memories that are usually inaccessible. That was one of Maurice's starting-points. Another clue came from hallucinogens, which destroy perceptual sets and make things we've seen a thousand times fresh and novel. And he was fascinated by the fact that certain types of heavy-metal poisoning

reduce the efficiency of the nervous system and cause significant derangement, yet can be cured by administering a chelating agent, a sort of internal detergent."

Randolph licked his lips. "So he'd been wondering for a long time whether our—our clumsiness in thinking might be due to a remediable cause. You know we are terribly lazy where thinking is concerned. We don't recall, let alone reason with, a fraction of the information we receive. Yet it's in store, and the right stimulus can bring it back.

"Anyway! Among the large number of compounds Maurice had evaluated was one he wanted to study in depth. Only so long as we still stood a chance of being first in the field with a synthetic replicant we had neither time nor resources to divert to it. Privately, however, he'd been doing some amazing theoretical analyses of its properties, and he said flatly that it ought to have an unprecedented effect on the nervous system, including the brain. He claimed it would excite a form of activity usually observed in association with the stimulus of novelty which—Oh, hell. I'm getting tied up in double-talk!"

"In lay terms"—unexpectedly from Kneller—"he said it would amplify intelligence. And damned if he wasn't as near to right as makes no difference. If that bastard, whoever he was, hadn't bashed his head in, he'd have been on the short list for the Nobel as a result."

"That's misleading," Randolph objected. "What we suspect it does is make selective inattention more difficult. Are you familiar with the term? It's the habit of ordering incoming sense-data into arbitrary classes 'important/unimportant'. I say arbitrary because although most authorities claim this is what keeps us sane, Maurice disagreed, and I now accept that he proved his point. At any rate in our lab animals the response is uniformly positive."

Kneller nodded. "Yes, rats and hamsters that typically make terribly broad classifications of events will suddenly start to react in ways that can only be accounted for by assuming they're registering differences of the kind we humans pay attention to: colour, texture, time of day, what sort of lab-coat you're wearing . . . Arthur is right, though, to say that's what we *suspect* is happening. We've never administered it to a human subject. But it looks as though it has finally been tested on a man." He pointed with a shaking hand at the note Hector was holding.

"You mean you think Dr. Post deliberately dosed himself with it?" Sawyer hazarded. "But surely he'd have told you, done it under controlled conditions!"

"It's all too likely," Kneller sighed. "We had been wondering whether he was overworking—he did seem very tired, very impatient . . . But it's no good speculating now."

"How in heaven's name could

you keep this a secret?" Hector burst out. "How long have you been working on it?"

"Since just after Sakulin's first paper appeared. About two years. But Maurice must have identified the original compound a year or more earlier still."

"But you can't have done it all by yourselves! I mean you and Maurice and Dr Randolph!" Hector took a pace forward. "Surely you must employ—well—lab technicians?"

Kneller said in a gravelly tone, "Yes, of course. And post-graduate students, too. But, you see, among the trustees of the Gull-Grant Foundation there's a move to have our Institute dissolved and sell the site for redevelopment. They'd have to go through the courts, but . . . Never mind! The point is that when we realised just what a colossal discovery Maurice had made we called a staff meeting and suggested that—short of being first to achieve a synthetic replicant—this was our best chance of putting the Institute so firmly on the map they wouldn't dare disband our team. Our staff are very loyal, and they agreed without exception. But Maurice had used standard techniques to synthesise VC, so if any hint of its existence had leaked out we'd certainly have been beaten into print. Priority in publication is all, you know, and there are lots of better-funded institutions that could run test-series in a month which our budget compels us to take a year over. So the staff willingly pledged

themselves not to breathe a word about VC until Maurice's definitive paper was complete. He was due to present it at the Organo-chemical Society in March."

"VC . . ." Sawyer said. "What does that stand for?"

"Well," Kneller answered slowly, "we haven't told you quite everything about this stuff. Remember how we chanced on it."

Hector's blood suddenly seemed to turn sluggish as mercury and drain from his head. The world swam around him as he forced out, "You mean it's a replicant?"

"Far and away the most successful ever synthesised," Kneller said. "Streets ahead of the best that Sakulin or anybody else has produced. It's not a virus, not in any standard sense of that term, but it does have this one viral attribute—which, incidentally," he interpolated, "we were no longer looking for by that time! It seems to be an inescapable corollary of the molecular structure . . . and there are enough papers waiting to be written about *that* to keep our staff contentedly quiet, believe me!"

"Right," Randolph agreed. "All being well, every member of our team can look forward to a solid lifetime of genuinely valuable research into this single substance and its close relations. You see, given the proper environment, it multiplies. Living-animal tissue is ideal. Which is why we call it 'viral coefficient'."

"You mean it breeds?" Sawyer

cried. "You mean it's infectious?"

"Not infectious!" Randolph snapped. "Cold air, sunlight, even dilution in plain water will inactivate it almost at once. But . . . Well, without being infectious, it may possibly be contagious. Which is why we'd better collect some equipment from our labs and get along to the police mortuary right away. We've got to establish whether Maurice—"

"Chief Inspector!" A voice echoing up the stairway.

"Up here!" Sawyer shouted back, and there was a pounding of footsteps and a moment later the driver of his car appeared, panting.

"Radio message, sir," he said between gasps. "They found a phial of capsules near the body. Looks like it's been trodden on, they said. At any rate all the capsules were broken open."

"Thank goodness for that!" Kneller exclaimed. "So we don't need to worry after all. A minute or two at sub-zero temperatures like today's, and— Campbell, look out!"

Hector whirled, and was just in time to catch the landlady as she slumped in a dead faint.

VII

AS HE SHRUGGED out of his great-coat, heavy with damp, Lance-Corporal Stevens caught a snatch of news being read over a radio playing in the orderly-room.

"—described as 'disastrous' by the manager of one of London's

largest department-stores today. In the hope of making up lost business at the last minute many shops will remain open for an extra two hours on Christmas Eve—”

—No skin off my nose, thank goodness. That’s my lot until after the holiday. Christ, I’m really looking forward to going home, in spite of all the arguments I’m bound to have with the old man!

He pushed open the orderly-room door and had taken two strides across the floor before he realised there was an officer present: the Church of England chaplain, to be exact, talking to the staff sergeant in charge. Belatedly Stevens threw up a salute, which the chaplain acknowledged with his usual vague smile and wave.

“Just a moment, sir, if you don’t mind,” the staff sergeant muttered, and went on more loudly, “So there you are, Stevens! Took your time over it today, didn’t you?”

“Well, staff, there was an awful lot of traffic—”

“Never mind the excuses! Double on over to the armoury and collect your rifle, and then pack your kit. And be quick about it!”

Stevens stared at him blankly.

“Don’t just stand there as though you’d grown roots! Acting Lance you may be, but on the strength it says you’re headquarters platoon runner for C company and you’re coming to Glasgow with the rest of us. It’s nearly five already and we have to be at RAF Uxbridge at six-thirty. Buses leave in forty minutes, and if you’re late I shall per-

sonally—”

But Stevens had departed at a run.

“Now where were we, sir?” the staff sergeant continued. “Oh, yes. Arrangements for notifying next of kin.”

“I REALLY THINK it’s *too bad* of Brother Bradshaw to have kept us hanging about the way he did,” fretted Lady Washgrave, seated at her elegant escritoire and poring over the seemingly endless pile of papers which the last postal delivery before Christmas had produced. “Having to overprint all our Crusade leaflets—print those special stickers and add them to our posters—telephone all the newspapers and amend the wording of our advertisements . . . I do wish he had had the *simple courtesy* to give us a little more notice!”

Tarquin Drew, who had actually had to take care of the tasks she was describing, was discreetly silent.

“Still . . .” Lady Washgrave gathered herself together; she had never done anything so un-ladylike as to *pull* herself together since she discovered the quite indecent meaning of the phrase “to pull a bird.” “One must admit it is very encouraging to see how we are appealing to the hearts and minds of the public who are disillusioned with the fruits of permissivity.” She leafed through some of the Christmas presents she had received on behalf of the Campaign: a thousand pounds from that

nice Mr. Filbone who was having such trouble with strikers at his factory in Scotland, fifty pence from "A Sympathetic Pensioner," with apologies that it was all she could afford, a sampler sewn by pupils at a convent school, and others and others far too numerous to take in all at once.

Not that even at this season of goodwill the whole of the post was of that nature. Here was the umpteenth complaint about a BBC serial based on the life of a jazz musician called Morton who when a mere teenager had played the piano in a brothel (disgusting!), and a book whose heroine, so the sender claimed, was "no better than a tart," and an excerpt from a so-called "marriage manual" which recommended practices so revolting they had almost put her off her lunch.

"Tarquin, kindly bring me a glass of sherry," she said at last. "I believe I shall need it to help me finish my stint today."

"Of course, milady, right away."

"OH, IT'S GOING to be a wonderful Christmas!" Harry Bott exclaimed to the children clustered around his knees: three of the four, the youngest still being a toddler and currently lying down in his cot. He took another sip from his mug of Guinness and wiped away the moustache of foam it donated to him. "Tomorrow we're going to see Uncle Joe in his big house, and there'll be presents for you all and a lovely tree with lots of lights on it,

and—oh, lots of marvelous things! Are you looking forward to it?"

"Oh, yes!" chorused the children, who were very fond of their father because in spite of sometimes being irritable he was always producing toys and gifts for them which other kids' parents swore they could not afford.

"And, come to think of it . . ." He looked at his oldest son Patrick. "You're being confirmed next Easter, aren't you? So maybe you ought to come to midnight Mass with us. See what you're letting yourself in for. What do you think, Vee?"

"What?" Busy pegging out baby-clothes on a line across the kitchen ceiling, too damp from the spin-drier not to be aired before re-use.

"Oh, what a fiddle-face! What's wrong with you, woman? Let's have a smile now and then! Christmas is supposed to be a happy time!"

For a long moment she stared at him; then she let fall the blouse she was holding and rushed weeping from the room.

"Oh, well, if that's how she feels . . ." Harry said with a shrug. "Here, Pat, give me some more Guinness, will you?"

VALENTINE CRAWFORD STARED DULLY at the TV screen, which currently showed the Pope addressing a huge crowd of unemployed in Rome; banners bearing words he could understand even without speaking Italian bobbed over the people's heads, demanding *LAVORE* and *GIUSTIZIA*! The sound, of

course, was not turned up. The room was crowded, and a record-player was blasting away, and people were dancing frantically and sometimes getting entangled in the paper streamers that decorated the ceiling, and in the kitchen next door the women were busy readying cold fried fish and sweet-potato pie, and rum-and-Coke was flowing by the gallon, and he was thoroughly miserable in the midst of all the frenetic artificial gaiety.

"Val!" Suddenly materialising before him, Cissy, looking gorgeous in her best party-dress—all the more so because it had been last year's best dress, too, and since then she had grown in some interesting places. "Don't just sit dere, man, looking like someone done t'ief yo' savings! Come an' dance with me!"

—And don't *you* come the island-talk with me. I know as well as you do you were born right here in England same as I was. . . .

But that wasn't fair. Faking a smile, he nodded and rose and later, for a while, he was able to join in the game of make-believe that everybody was sharing, the pretence that tomorrow everything would really be all right and it would be possible to walk down the street without buckra bastards spitting at your feet and buckra busies stopping and searching you on principle.

Not to mention buckra bitches accusing you of rape.

"GOOD NEWS FOR YOU, chief,"

Sergeant Epton said as David Sawyer entered the office which they shared.

"Such as what?" Sawyer countered sourly. It was not quite as cold as it had been last week, but the sky was still shedding intermittent sleet, so that every time the wind did drop back below freezing-point the streets acquired a fresh glaze of ice, which was bound to lead to record accident-levels over Christmas. . . .

—Christ, I think I'm going to resign one of these days. What's on my score-card for this month? Mostly, the poor bastards I arrested at that orgy we raided. When I think of the stag-party we held for Inspector Hawker when he was getting married. . . . But of course that was just after I joined, and things were different then. Better, maybe. Can the social climate really have turned over this quickly? Yes, I suppose it can. After all, it only took twenty years from Edwardian tea-gowns to flappers' skirts, knee-high, and less than that from "The New Look" to the minidress. . . . We're bouncing back and forth like table-tennis balls, free and easy one moment, scared of ourselves the next and having to invoke Divine Law or some other outside principle to help us make our minds up. But I wish I could pick up some real villains! I wish they'd let me! I don't want to be a monitor of private morals! I want to be a thief-taker, I want to see pushers and racketeers behind bars!

—And murderers.

"The Post murder," Epton said. "You can relax over Christmas. It's being looked after at top level, and they don't want us involved any more."

"What?"

Epton stared at him in surprise. "Chief, I thought you'd be pleased! I mean, it's the first murder on our patch in nearly a year, isn't it? A black mark on the map!" He pointed at the unsolved-crimes chart; it had sprouted even more coloured pins. "But now it's no longer our pigeon."

—The bastards!

Sawyer clenched his fists. It was one thing to call in the Yard murder squad; that was routine, and done even by provincial police forces, because Scotland Yard boasted the most experienced detectives in the country, whose advice was always welcome. It was something else again to write the local force out of a murder investigation completely, as though they were too incompetent to be involved.

But, aloud, he forced out, "Yes—yes, that does mean we shall have a better chance to enjoy Christmas."

"It's a load off my mind, anyway," Epton grunted.

Sawyer hesitated. Suddenly he said, "Brian, tell me something. Who do you think did more harm in the world—Hitler, or Don Juan?"

"What?"

"You heard me!"

"Of course I did! But . . . Hitler or *who*?"

—Should have known better than

to ask such a question of Brian, a pillar of his local Baptist church.

"Never mind." Turning wearily away. "Merry Christmas!"

"PROFESSOR KNELLER—Dr Randolph?" A smooth-voiced aide appearing at the door of the panelled anteroom where they had been required to wait. "The Home Secretary will see you now. If you would kindly come with me . . .?"

Randolph was doing his best to preserve a polite demeanour. After twenty minutes' waiting, Kneller had abandoned all pretence. Temperamentally he was the more irascible of the two, and now he was into his fifties he felt entitled.

However, he contrived a formal nod of acknowledgment as the Right Honourable Henry Charkall-Phelps, PC, MP, rose and accorded them a frosty greeting, followed by an invitation to sit down on lavishly-padded leather chairs facing his broad desk. He was thin, with a pinched face and pursed lips, and his brown hair was receding towards his crown. He wore traditional City clothing, black jacket and pin-striped trousers. His tie too was black. The sole concession to ornament which he allowed himself was a Moral Pollution pin in gold on his left lapel, but even that was half the size of the regular kind.

He was not alone. Apart from the aide who had escorted Kneller and Randolph into the room, two other men were present. One was stout, with a ginger moustache, and even before he was introduced the visi-

tors had recognised him from his pictures on TV and in the papers: Detective Chief Superintendent Owsley, assigned to head the investigation into Maurice Post's death. The other, a man of about thirty-five with his hair cut short and his face almost aggressively clean-shaven, wore an RAF blazer and matching tie, and was identified merely as "Dr. Gifford", no explanation being given for his presence.

There were more nods.

"Well, gentlemen!" Charkall-Phelps planted his elbows on his desk and set his fingertips together. "While I regret having to call you here on the eve of the Christmas holiday—and would indeed myself far rather be at home with my family!—certain aspects of the case of your late colleague Dr Post's tragic demise, which have been drawn to my attention, leave me no alternative course." He looked severely at Kneller and Randolph, his manner that of a headmaster before whom two unruly pupils had been brought up for circulating a petition demanding his dismissal.

Kneller snorted. "Such as—?" he countered.

"Such as the fact that apparently you have been experimenting behind locked doors and in secret with a substance of wholly unknown potential!"

"Where better to keep such a substance than behind locked doors? And what's the point of announcing it until we've studied its properties in detail?"

Randolph failed to stifle a

chuckle; Kneller had scored a fine debating-point on the first exchange.

Charkall-Phelps was not amused. His narrow lips firmed into a dead straight line for a moment; then he rasped, "But you don't deny that that's what you've been doing! And what is more—what is *far* more—according to your own findings Dr. Post was himself infected with this substance!"

"It's quite true that we found traces of vc in his body at the post-mortem," Kneller conceded after a brief hesitation.

"Is it not also true that he abstracted a quantity of the substance from your laboratory?" Charkall-Phelps persisted.

"If you're referring to the capsules found near his body, they were very probably not the source of what we found in his tissues," Kneller snapped. "Our best assumption is that owing to the volatility of the supportive medium in which we keep vc—"

"Professor!" Charkall-Phelps broke in. "I am not interested in your theorising. I am very interested in the safety of the public at large. It *is* a fact, and please don't waste time by contradicting me, that both in Dr. Post's body and in his pocket a quantity of vc was taken from your laboratories and released to the world. There can be no repetition of any such—such *oversight*, to use the most tactful term. I might justifiably employ a stronger one. I might, for example, say that never before

have I encountered such a blend of scientific arrogance and rash incompetence."

Kneller turned perfectly white. "So you brought us here to pillory us, did you? I might have guessed, knowing how often at Moral Pollution meetings you've referred to people like us as blasphemous meddlers!"

"Professor, don't attempt to make this a question of personalities. There's a matter of principle at stake. While it's true that ordinarily regulations governing research are administered through the Department of the Environment, they do have the force of law, and since the Home Office is the Ministry the police come under, when it's a crime as grave as murder which brings the facts to light it's my plain duty to take action. I did not call you here to 'pillory' you, but to inform you that you are required to make your records available to Dr. Gifford for study and evaluation!"

Randolph snapped his fingers. "Gifford! I thought you looked familiar! Are you S.G.W. Gifford? Porton Down Microbiological Research Centre?"

The man in the blazer inclined his head. "Formerly, yes. Currently I'm attached to the Home Office, of course."

"But you have no authority to—!" Randolph was on his feet now.

"Dr. Randolph, we have excellent grounds for intervening," Charkall-Phelps cut in. "If you would cast your mind back to a certain

contract you undertook for the Ministry of Defence, which involved techniques for mass-producing a novel type of antibiotic and which was financed by public funds . . . ? Ah, I see you do recall it. Good. Then the matter is settled. Now, if you'll excuse me, I am *very* busy. Merry Christmas to you both!"

VIII

"**R**UTH! RUTH, THAT IS YOU, I know! I recognise your breathing!"

The quiet words roused her from the pile of cushions she had used to improvise a bed. The room was in total darkness, because she had drawn the curtains tight against the cold outside; though the snow of last week had mostly given way to hail and sleet, it was still freezing hard every night.

"Malcolm! You finally woke up!" She snatched a robe around her and by touch located the switch that controlled the nearest light. Shaded to the point where it was not a shock to her eyes, it showed her his face as he rolled over in the bed: pale, unshaven, but visibly less tense than she knew her own to be. "How do you feel?"

"I . . . I feel pretty good. Very relaxed. Very rested. But I'm starving hungry!"

And then in sudden astonishment: "But what the hell are you doing here, anyway?"

Rising, padding towards him barefoot and pausing only to turn on the electric heater, she parried,

"That's a good sign, anyhow."

And, one step from his side, her self-control failed, and she fell forward on her knees, clutching at him.

"Malcolm, thank heaven you are all right! I've been so—so *terrified!*"

"What?" Raising himself on his elbow, he stared at her. "Why? I told you: I feel fine. I feel as though I've slept for days on end . . . Oh, lord." With abrupt fearful realisation. "I have, haven't I? I mean literally!"

Drawing back a fraction, she glanced at the bedside clock and nodded. "Yes, Malcolm. It's now about five-twenty a.m. on December 27th."

"I've slept clear through Christmas?" Appalled, he made to throw back the covers and jump from the bed; she caught his shoulders and made him lean back on the pillows again.

"You stay right where you are!" she ordered.

Yielding, seeming weak, he said, "But why aren't you with your brother in Kent? That's where you said you were going!"

"I . . . I decided not to go." Shivering a little, she reached out one arm to turn the heater so that its blast of warmth came at her directly, but with her other hand maintained her grasp of him as though half-afraid he might melt into the air.

"I can see that!" he retorted. "But when I flaked out I . . . Have you been looking after me all the

time?"

"Billy spelled me. He didn't have anywhere special to go. And if you're worried about the scandal, there's no need. Mary's away, Len's away, Reggie's away . . . We've had the place to ourselves."

"But this is crazy! Did you call the doctor?"

"We decided not to."

"What? If I was lying here right through Christmas and—"

"If we had," she interrupted, "you could very well have found yourself in jail."

He gaped unashamedly. "Ruth, I don't understand!"

"And you better hadn't try until you've woken up properly. I haven't." She yawned and rubbed her eyes. "Wait until I've got the sleep out of me. How about a hot drink? There isn't too much food left—all the shops have been shut, of course—but I have plenty of milk. Hot chocolate?"

"Damn it, stop talking in riddles!" He broke free of her and swung his legs to the floor.

"Only if you get back into bed!" she countered.

"In a minute! I—uh—I *have* to get up!"

"Oh. Oh, sorry. I should have realised. Though, come to think of it, that's another proof we were right." Glancing around, she spotted his bathrobe and handed it to him.

"Proof of what?" he snapped, belting it around him.

"Well, I've had a lot of practice nursing, what with my mother

being bed-ridden for so long, and Billy said he'd had to take care of a lot of friends who were on bad trips with acid and mescaline . . . Anyhow, we knew all the right tests, and your pulse was normal and your temperature was normal and you were turning over the way people do when they're asleep, so we were sure you weren't in coma or even in a drunken stupor, which of course was what we first—"

"Stop!" Malcolm ordered, and broke past her and headed for the door. "I don't have time to talk!"

"Chocolate yes or no?" she called after him.

"No! Hot milk and Bovril—I need the protein! I know I have some Bovril left. I can smell it!" And the door slammed.

THE TOILET FLUSHED, but he did not return at once, and she was just beginning to wonder what had become of him when overhead a door opened and closed and there were footsteps on the stairs and she heard Billy exclaim in amazement, "Malcolm, you woke up! Are you okay now?"

"Yes, I feel fine," Malcolm answered, and preceded Billy back into the room. "I gather," he went on, "that you two think you've kept me out of jail. Would you mind explaining what in hell that's supposed to mean?"

Handing him his hot drink, which he carried over to the bed again so he could sit down in the flow of warm air, Ruth said, "Well, I was going to say: when you passed out

we thought you were just drunk, and Billy and I sat talking here for a while and didn't realise how much time was passing, and then all of a sudden there was this reference on the radio news to the Hampstead Arms. The pub where you met Morris, you said."

"You don't have to add footnotes! I remember okay!" Malcolm snapped, and immediately relented. "I'm sorry. But, you see . . ." He thrust his fingers comb-fashion through his tousled hair. "No, how could you see? I'm terribly confused myself. But I can remember everything, and I mean *everything*!"

Billy and Ruth exchanged baffled glances.

"I'm remembering, and remembering, and—and I can't stop! That's why I had to get drunk!" He set aside his mug, his face betraying agony, and she darted to drop on her knees at his side.

"What kind of things?" Billy ventured.

"There's no end to them. Want to know what the weather was like on my second birthday? Windy and raining—I can hear the branches rattling at the window. Want to know the name of the guineapigs they kept when I was in infant school? Things that I thought I'd forgotten years ago are coming back, coming back . . ." Retrieving his mug, he clasped both hands around it as though needing its heat to overcome the fit of shivers racking him.

"So what about the Hampstead

Arms?" he added after a pause.

"It said on the radio the police were anxious to contact everybody who'd been there the night before, because they're looking for a murderer. And then in the papers on Christmas Eve . . . Ruth, find that copy of the *Guardian* and show him."

She hesitated. "Are you sure we ought to—?"

"That one?" Malcolm shot out his arm and pointed at a paper lying on a table on the far side of the room, almost completely in shadow. "That's Morris, the man I took the pill from! Only—*Oh!*"

"So we were right," Billy said quietly to Ruth.

"You were but I wasn't," Malcolm said. "I took it for granted Morris was his surname, M-O-R, but it was M-A-U, Maurice Post! And someone killed him!"

"How the hell did you know that?" Billy demanded.

"Why, it says right in the caption who he is!"

"You can read it at that distance, in that light?" Billy said incredulously.

"I— Oh my God." Malcolm sat bolt upright, looking dazedly about him as though he had this moment realised the room was in near-darkness, with only one shaded lamp alight. "But I can read it. It says, 'Dr. Maurice Post, the distinguished biochemist'—and that's not right because he told me he was an organochemist which isn't the same—'who was found dead on a

development site in Kentish Town yesterday.' Am I right?"

"Yes," Ruth whispered. "I've read that caption over and over until I know it by heart. Malcolm, something terribly strange has happened to you, hasn't it? The way you could tell there were four godheads crossing the street—the way you smelled the mackerel I brought even though it was tightly wrapped and my shopping was in the hallway—what you said just now about smelling the Bovril, too, because when I found the jar the lid was screwed well down . . ." She shook her head, mystified. "Do you think it's because of the vc?"

"I suppose it must be," Malcolm looked alarmed. "But just a moment; let's take it in order! You didn't call a doctor because people from the pub were being interviewed by the police, and according to Billy it's near to where one of the biggest pushers in London lives. So you realised you would have to tell a doctor about my taking the pill, and—"

Billy interrupted. "For all we knew, it might be a local name for something extremely illegal. I guess it was my—uh—my New York instincts which made me warn Ruth not to call a doctor. Once I did call one to help a friend of mine who had taken an overdose of hash—just hash, nothing worse, but so much that he was getting a hell of a bum trip off it—and the result was I wished a year in jail on the poor guy. I could see you waking up with a cop at your bedside!"

"And especially since I'd have been among the last people to see Post before he died . . ." Malcolm gave a nod. "Yes, it could have been like that. I'm very much obliged. But it was a hell of a risk you were running, wasn't it?"

"Not half the risk you took by swallowing that vc cap!" Billy retorted. "Do you really have no idea what it was?"

Malcolm grinned sheepishly. "No. Absolutely none."

"Why the hell did you *do* it, then?"

"Because I was so depressed I was half-minded to commit suicide!" Malcolm exclaimed. "I wanted to get drunk, or stoned, or *something*, just so that I could forget this miserable world for a few hours."

"Have you been into drugs before at all?"

"Oh, pot was easier to get when I was in college, so I used to smoke now and then. But I never missed it when it sort of faded from the scene. And of course I used amphetamines a few times, to stay up all night studying, but I found they didn't help much. And once I tried acid. But it was a half-and-half trip, if you know what I mean—so delicately balanced between good and bad I never felt tempted to try again. And that's the lot. I mean apart from medical drugs, prescribed for me. Tranquillisers."

Ruth said, "Billy, you know a lot about drugs, don't you? Have you ever heard of anything that could have this sort of effect?"

"This memory thing, you mean? This heightening of the senses? Never. I mean, not except on a very short-term basis. Malcolm, you said you were getting drunk the other evening because of it. Now, apparently, you still have it. Stronger, weaker, about the same?"

"Stronger," Malcolm said positively.

"Does it feel good or bad?"

"Neither. Strange. Different. It was frightening at first, but . . . No, I don't feel afraid of it any more."

"Can you describe what it's like?"

Malcolm pondered, supping at his drink. At length he said, "I can give a sort of analogy. Imagine you took a floodlight for the first time into the attic of a house you've lived in all your life, where you've always imagined there was nothing but useless lumber. And you switch on the lamp, and all of a sudden you realise you're surrounded by priceless heirlooms—Rembrandts and Goyas and heaven knows what else. Well, that's a very faint shadow of how I'm feeling right now."

"By the sound of it you ought to be overjoyed," Ruth said. "You don't look it."

"No. And there's good reason. Because there is lumber up here too, of course." He tapped his temple. "And stupidity. My God, stupidity with knobs and bells on! How could I ever have been such a fool as to . . . ? Never mind. It's years too late to go back and put

that right."

"What?" Ruth said.

"I'd rather not tell you," was Malcolm's prompt answer. He was relaxing now, moment by moment, as though within his head some process of review was taking place that was bringing him to terms with himself in the manner a psychiatrist might dream of achieving for his patients.

"Well, whatever it was," Ruth said tartly, "I don't believe it can have been half as foolish as taking this vc pill. Nor can it have caused half as much trouble. Don't you realise I've had to spend Christmas sleeping on that heap of cushions when I should have been at my brother's—that I had to beg off with lies about not being well enough to travel—that my nephews cried when I told them on the phone they weren't going to see me after all?" She glared at him. "Not to mention the agonies I went through when you slept on, and on, and *on*!"

"She's right," Billy said soberly. "We'd just about decided we'd been wrong, and you weren't going to wake up naturally after all, so we'd have to face the consequences of calling a doctor and explain why we didn't do it before. And given my reputation, and yours, and—"

"And what shreds are left of mine!" Ruth cut in.

"Yes. Yes, I see what you mean," Malcolm confessed. "I think you've been wonderful. I'm terribly grateful to you both. And even if it was a fearful gamble it has turned out for the best in the end."

Setting his empty mug on the bedside table, he walked over to pick up the paper with Post's photograph displayed, and shook it around to the front page as he returned to where he had been sitting.

Billy said, "I'm not so sure of that."

"What?" Malcolm countered absently.

"About it turning out for the best, of course! I mean, you've been left with what sound like lasting side-effects, right? You're pretty cheerful right now, but how long is that going to go on?"

"Not very long," Malcolm said, eyes racing down the major news-stories in the paper, then turning it over to follow them on to the back page. "Dalessandro! Yes, Morris mentioned that guy—I mean Maurice Post. I didn't remember hearing about him at the time, but I recall him now. A super-patriot with a fanatical right-wing following, the kind of guy who lays flowers at shrines in memory of Mussolini."

"What do you mean, not very long?" Ruth insisted.

"What I've got . . ." Malcolm licked his lips. "It isn't just being able to remember. It's being able to include what I remember in my calculations. See trends and tendencies I never noticed before. Do you realise I've almost certainly missed the last Christmas?"

"What?"—from both of them, uncomprehendingly.

"When Post told me the conclu-

sions he'd drawn from the news, I didn't really believe him. I just pretended to agree because I was in the right kind of mood not to care if the world did come to an end.

"But now I can fit together in my mind all the hints, all the clues he was referring to, directly or by implication. I can make a pattern of them, the same way he must have done. And do you know what the pattern shows?"

He glanced from one to the other of them, as though challenging them to contradict.

"What the pattern shows is World War Three."

Book Two
CRESCENT

"I was a Zen Buddhist in the 9th grade, a Hindu in the 10th, I just smoked dope in the 11th grade, then I became a vegetarian, but now I've found the Lord."

—An 18-year-old Jesus freak:
quoted in *The Last Supplement*
to the *Whole Earth Catalog*

"LOOK AT THEM! LOOK!" Half out of his seat although the safety-belt lights were still on, Don Gebhart pointed through the window of the airliner as it taxied towards the terminal at London Airport. He was a rangy man with a prominent Adam's apple, who always dressed in black; skeletal, he did not look in the least like a person who readily grew excited, and in fact was not. But this was an

exception.

"Thousands of them!" he went on. "And a cabinet minister right in there with the rest! Even a pop group doesn't get a welcome like this nowadays—and Lady Washgrave has promised they'll line the route into the city, too, clear to your hotel!"

Bobbing under grey sleet like a field of lunatic flowers, streamers hung from dayglo-painted crosses repeated and repeated the slogan: WELCOME BROTHER BRADSHAW!

"I hope they don't catch cold," Bradshaw muttered.

"Oh, Bob, what's wrong with you?" Gebhart demanded. "You should be glad that so many people want you to lead them to the light—you've got to be glad!"

"I'll do my best," Bradshaw sighed.

The welcome was indeed fantastic. The hysteria grew and grew while he was posing for the cameras with the Right Honourable Henry Charkall-Phelps, and Lady Washgrave, and a dozen public figures who were patrons of her Campaign, and it reached such a climax as he was being escorted to the limousine awaiting him that the crowd broke the police cordon and mobbed him with crosses and bouquets.

And, in one case, a cut-throat razor.

Just in time, he flung up his arm as he saw the glint of steel, and the bone of his forearm blunted the blade on the way towards its intended target. But there was a sudden wash of brilliant red under

the TV lights lining his path, and it turned to grey as all colour and all sensation drained from the world.

"My name is Heather Pogson," the girl who had wielded the razor told reporters. "I am twenty-one. Last time I saw Bob Bradshaw was eight years ago. He took me to a party where everybody was smoking pot, and when I was stoned he screwed me and made me pregnant. But then he claimed it wasn't his fault and ran away back to America. My baby—our baby—had to be aborted. I swore I'd get him, somehow, next time he came in range. I'm only sorry there were too many people in the way for me to slash his face instead of his arm."

Then two policewomen closed in and took her away to jail, whereupon the reporters went to see whether Lady Washgrave had recovered yet. On being splashed with Bradshaw's blood, she had fainted.

IT WAS VERY COLD in the warehouse. David Sawyer struggled not to let his teeth chatter, as though that faint a sound might be heard from the skylight through which they expected the intruders to approach.

Rexwell's had never been robbed. It was a wonder, considering that their products—cassette recorders and miniature transistor radios—were ideal booty for a thief: easy to hide, constantly in demand, relatively expensive, and backed by the reputation of a well-known brand-

name. The management had at first pooh-pooed the idea of setting an ambush here, saying how good their plant security must be. But they hadn't run across Harry Bott before, and Sawyer had. When Harry took an interest in premises previously unburgled, it followed that he had spotted something other villains had missed. Using all his powers of persuasion, he had finally put the point over. Even so . . . !

"He'd damned well better show," he muttered to Epton, across the aisle between the stacked crates with his radio to his ear. "Four times I've had that bugger in the dock—four! And each time he's whistled up the parish priest to say what a good family man he is, how his kids would starve while he was inside . . . Are you *sure* about the sniff?"

"How can I be sure?" Epton answered grumpily. "All I can say is what I've already told you—Stuffy Wilkins has seen him paying far too much attention to this place lately, and if the night watchman can't be relied on, who can?"

"Agreed, agreed. But I wish we could nab that brother-in-law of his instead," Sawyer sighed. He meant Joe Feathers; he and Harry Bott had married sisters. What hard-drug traffic was left in North-West London was notoriously due to him.

"Fat chance!" Epton countered scornfully. "Up there in his big house with his luxury cars and his—"

The radio said softly, "Alpha

Hotel, Alpha Hotel, we have a bogey for you. Austin van Kilo Lima Kilo nine-ah-three-ah-six-ah, known to have been stolen!"

"That must be them!" Sawyer whispered thankfully, and they waited out the rest of the time in tense silence.

Then at last there was a scraping at the skylight, and it was heard to creak back on its hinges, and he rose and moved into the aisle directly under it and shone his powerful flashlight upwards and said in a mild voice, "Okay, it's a fair cop, isn't it?"

But Harry was so startled that he lost his footing and tried to grab the skylight to stop himself falling and only half-managed it and came smashing down on top of Sawyer in such a welter of broken glass that both of them had to be rushed to hospital.

—HOPE TO GOODNESS the kid's okay. Hasn't been much of a Christmas for him . . . "Season of good cheer!" Maybe if you're white and in work and have plenty of money! Though I must admit Cissy's family did their best for both of us. And the other brothers and sisters, too. That's a thing missing from buckra society in London, this give-and-take kind of helpfulness. They do say it used to be found in the old East End, and went with the Blitz. Now even the people who used to be notorious for mutual support, like the Jews, even they seem to have given it up. Trust the goddamn whites not to know

when they had a good thing going for them!

Circumspect, but moving quickly because it was another dark and very cold night, with sleet pelting down which had soaked and frozen him to the marrow, Valentine Crawford approached the block of low-rent council flats which was his home, humming Big Bill Broonzy's *Black Brown and White* to keep up his spirits.

—Wish I didn't have to leave the boy alone, but bringing him out with that cough of his in weather like tonight . . . Still, I hope he'll be pleased with these toys.

He'd managed to acquire some very good stuff for Toussaint, and paid next to nothing for it. It came from a street-market. The trader had meant all the items to sell before Christmas, and today had marked them down because he was in a hurry to push his barrow home out of the wet.

Now, up the outside stairs. Here he was always cautious; this time he was especially so, because during the holiday the light at the corner of his landing had been broken by a gang of drunken youths throwing stones, and it hadn't yet been repaired.

—Another ten paces, and . . .

"There he is," a voice muttered, and two dark shapes rushed from deep shadow. He raised his purchases to shield his face, so they went for his belly instead, and a line that burned like ice was drawn across him hip to hip. He fell screaming in a clutter of illwrapped

parcels and they kicked him a couple of times and ran down to the street laughing with satisfaction. Whoever they were.

—BLOODY AWFUL CHRISTMAS!
Bloody awful weather! Bloody awful people! Bloody army! If I'd known I was letting myself in for this lot I'd never have signed up!

Dennis Stevens had been no further north before than Birmingham. Now, with the rest of his patrol—five, counting the officer in command—he was nervously marching along a road in a slummy district of Glasgow where half the streetlamps had been smashed and every window was dark, though he was convinced people were watching on every side, waiting to do something dreadful.

He'd had vague mental pictures, as a boy, of army life. His father had been conscripted for National Service and spent a year in Cyprus. But those images of a strange country where you couldn't read the writing, let alone speak the language, and swarthy snipers lurked among sun-scorched rocks, didn't seem to correspond at any point with this reality of walking down a cold street carrying a gun.

—I don't get it. I don't get it at all. It must be what they *want* the government to do: send us here. Otherwise why would they be planting bombs and setting buildings on fire and all the rest of it? The more they do of that sort of thing, the more troops are going to be shipped north, and in the end, far

as I can see, the whole bloody city is going to be a pile of smoking ruins!

Somebody had celebrated Christmas by blowing up the Town Hall. He'd seen the casualties. Only half a dozen of them, people who'd been walking or driving past, because of course the place was empty over the holiday, but it had turned his stomach to watch them being carried away.

—And who'd want to live in a ruined city?

And then . . .

"Down!" A scream from the lieutenant leading the patrol, and Dennis Stevens reacted just that fraction too late. From a rooftop someone had thrown a chopper-bomb, full of nails and old razor-blades and bits of glass. It landed square at his heels and cut him up, as his sergeant later told reporters, "like a side of butcher's meat."

He heard a rattle of shots, and carried that and pain into oblivion.

"IT'S A DISASTER!" moaned Amelia, Lady Washgrave. "The trouble we had to go to, and the expense, issuing all those revised leaflets, and having stickers pasted over our Crusade posters at the last moment—"

"Calm yourself, ma'am," Don Gebhart soothed. "Everything will be okay."

"But the dirt the papers have dug up!" She was literally wringing her hands. "I didn't know that last time he was here he was arrested for possessing marijuana! Nobody told me! I really think the Home

Secretary ought to have known, though, and I'm going to ring up Mr Charkall-Phelps right away and give him a piece of my mind!"

"Ma'am, that was before his conversion," Gebhart insisted. "And isn't it one of the chief reasons for your Crusade that in the bad old days of even eight years ago things like that were being allowed to happen—girls of thirteen being debauched by young men, sometimes even with the consent of their parents?"

Conscious of having scored a point, though sweating slightly because it had been such a near thing, he added, "So don't you worry, ma'am. I've talked with Bob's doctors and they say he's getting on fine, just fine. Like the posters promise, he's going to be there on schedule come January first, and who could ask for better proof of his devotion to the cause of the Lord?"

"PROFESSOR KNELLER?" the phone said softly.

"Ah . . . Yes! Who is that?"

"Professor, does the term 'vc' mean anything to you?"

"What? Who is that speaking?"

"Ah. I thought you might recognise the name. I think we ought to have a quiet talk."

"I said *who is that?*"

"Do you know a pub called the Hampstead Arms? If you would care to meet me . . ."

X

"I WONDER WHY 'Mr. X' chose

this of all pubs for our rendezvous," Kneller muttered as he braked his car opposite the Hampstead Arms.

"Was it Maurice's regular local, Hector?" Randolph asked from the back seat.

"No, but he liked it better than the one nearest his home. I came here with him two or three times." Climbing out of the car, Hector shivered. Though the snow and sleet had stopped and the sky was clear, the wind was knife-keen.

"All I can say is, I hope we're not on a complete fool's errand," Kneller grunted as he locked the driver's door.

"Or walking into an ambush laid by the killer," Hector suggested.

Kneller stared in horror, then relaxed and gave a snort.

"Hah! I took you seriously for a moment. If that's what you think, why did you agree to come with us?"

Hastening across the road, he pulled open the pub door and stood back to let his companions pass ahead. Hector, going first, stopped so abruptly Randolph bumped into him.

"What's the matter?"

"Sorry! I just recognised someone. The man at the table in the corner." With a jerk of his head Hector indicated a thin man with a skimpy new brown beard, wearing a black anorak, sitting next to an attractive dark-haired woman in a blue coat. Both of them had reacted to the newcomers' arrival . . . but then, so had everybody else in the crowded bar, if only to glance up

and see who had let in that blast of freezing air and made the Christmas decorations dance.

"Who is he?" Kneller muttered. "He looks vaguely familiar."

"Name of Fry," Hector answered. "Came to our casualty department the other day with a friend who'd been beaten up by a godhead gang. Funny to find him this far north. I recall he said he lives in Kentish Town."

"Lured by this place's sudden notoriety?" Randolph suggested sourly. "I bet they haven't done this much business for ages . . . Did you say he was beaten up by godheads?"

"Not him. His friend. The same morning my office was vandalised—I mean, the same morning I found it had been."

"Aren't they bastards?" Randolph shuddered. "You've seen the evening papers?" One lay on the seat of a nearby chair which was temporarily vacant; he pointed at it. "Two of them have been charged with setting fire to a Hindu temple in Willesden. Synagogues next, I suppose."

"What do you mean, next?" Kneller countered. "More like already! Ask my Jewish friends about it . . . Well, what's it to be, assuming I can fight my way through and get served?"

"Just a minute," Hector said. "Fry's coming this way."

Pushing towards them with a crooked smile, the brown-bearded man said quietly, "Good evening, Dr. Campbell. I didn't expect to

meet you here."

"I—ah . . ." Hector hesitated, unwilling to get involved in conversation owing to the reason which had brought them. As though divining his thoughts, Malcolm turned his smile into a grin.

"But I did expect Professor Kneller and Dr. Randolph."

There was a dead pause between them, while the rest of the pub chatter continued unabated.

"You?" Kneller forced out at last.

"Forgive the cloak-and-dagger approach, but it was a shot in the dark anyway, and even if I suggested this place for our meeting I couldn't be sure you'd take me seriously. I'm glad you did so, though." Lowering his voice, Malcolm added, "You see, Maurice Post not only talked to me in here the night he died, but gave me some VC."

"You mean you took it?" Randolph clenched his fists.

"Yes."

"And—?" Kneller demanded.

"And here I am."

"Side-effects?"

"Yes, but . . . Look, get some drinks and join us in the corner. The friend I'm with knows all about it. You can talk freely in front of her."

WHEN, BY A COMBINATION of pushing and arrogance, they had contrived to group chairs for them all around the table where Malcolm and Ruth were sitting, Kneller took a gulp of his beer and said, "Fry! I

thought I recognised you. Weren't you the teacher who got hounded out of his job about a year ago?"

"That's right,"

"Of all the incredible coincidences! Maurice mentioned you to me only a couple of weeks back."

"And to me," Hector said. "Last time I saw him he cited your case as an example of what's wrong with our society. He said—let me get this right—he said that among the chief reasons why we can't cope with the consequences of our own ingenuity is that whenever a genuinely open-minded teacher tries to pass that attitude on to his pupils, the entrenched authorities grow frightened and shut his mouth."

"Which is true," Malcolm said with a nod. "He said roughly the same to me, instancing those opponents of Darwin who would rather have lost a limb than abandon Special Creation. But I can see Professor Kneller wants to question me."

"So do I!" Randolph snapped. "If you knew how . . . No, you do the talking. What's VC done to you?"

"Intensified my sensory perceptions to a degree I wouldn't have imagined possible. Beginning with the senses we most neglect. I hope Ruth won't mind my saying"—with a sidelong glance—"that it first showed on the tactile level."

Ruth pulled a face at him, which broke down into a grin.

"Hearing and smell followed concurrently, and sight was af-

fectured last. I seem to be able to adjust far faster than before to low light-levels; the rod-cone changeover is almost under voluntary control. As for the senses we don't normally call senses . . . Ruth, that can of fruit-juice I wouldn't drink."

She nodded. "I opened it this morning. It tasted okay to me. But when Malcolm looked at the fine print on the label he found it declared some unpronounceable preservative, and this afternoon we looked it up at the library."

"It's a suspected carcinogen," Malcolm said. "Banned in Spain, Israel and the States, but apparently not in South Africa, where the juice came from." He made a helpless gesture. "It's supposed to be tasteless. How I knew it was in there, I can't say. I just *knew*."

"Not because he'd seen the label," Ruth supplied. "I'd decanted the contents and thrown the can away."

Kneller and Randolph exchanged stares. "By the sound of it," Kneller said slowly, "Maurice's wildest hopes are being overfulfilled!"

Randolph leaned forward. "How did you come to meet Maurice, Mr. Fry?"

"Pure chance. I passed by here and came in for a drink. It was five-forty by the clock over the bar." He pointed, but when the others glanced around all they could see was paper streamers and dangling strips of tinsel. "He asked if I was Malcolm Fry, the ex-teacher, and

we started talking. And went on for a good three hours. Making me, I may say, very late for a date with Ruth."

"And he actually gave you some vc?" Hector snapped.

"Yes, in a little yellow capsule."

"Was he drunk?"

"Very. I think I know why. I suspect I also know why he got killed."

Kneller pursed his lips. "Explain!" he commanded.

"Well, the next afternoon I decided to get drunk, too. While I didn't realise it at the time, there was a valid reason. I was feeling the full impact of the vc. It was as though my senses had been whetted to intolerable keenness. I had to damp down the inrush of data, and alcohol did help. In fact a friend of mine who was manic-depressive before he was stabilised in lithium salts once said alcohol was the best emergency prophylactic against his manic phase. Of course, though, assuming that Dr. Post had dosed himself with vc, what he should have done was go to bed and sleep the clock around four or five times."

"Did it make you sleep for a long time?" Hector demanded.

"I slept clear through Christmas Day, Boxing Day, over five hours into the morning of the 27th."

"Evans and Newman!" Hector said with a snap of his fingers.

Kneller looked a question at him. He amplified. "The Evans-Newman theory of sleep states that we don't sleep to recover from

fatigue, only in order to dream. The idea is that the brain needs the chance to review the sense-data accumulated during the previous period of wakefulness and use them to update its programming, so to speak. If you go without sleep for too long, you become irritable, your shortterm memory breaks down, and eventually you hallucinate."

"Precisely," Malcolm said. "I'm convinced the main reason why I'm here, and tolerably rational, after this fantastic experience, is that Ruth and another friend of ours decided not to have me hospitalised, but leave me to wake up in my own time. But for that . . .!" He gave Ruth's arm an affectionate squeeze.

"When I met Maurice, on the other hand, I imagine he was well past the point at which he should have collapsed into bed. He was already rather aggressive when I insisted at last that I *must* go away, and since he was drunk as well he could all too easily have got involved in a quarrel . . . That is pure guesswork, though. I gather the police are making no progress in the case, and I may be absolutely wrong."

Hector tugged at his beard. "This—this long period of sleep. You think it was purely due to sensory overload?"

"No, another factor is involved."

"Memory!" Kneller exclaimed.

"Precisely. Much, perhaps most, of the overload is not due to present-time input, but to a kind of stock-taking which re-presents to

consciousness all the data already in store." Malcolm gave a wry smile, passing his fingers through his untidy brown hair. "Believe you me, that's exhausting! And not entirely pleasant. But in my case at any rate it has come under control—or at least not gotten out of control."

Nodding, Kneller said, "It fits. Oh, yes, it all fits."

"What worries me"—Ruth spoke up with mingled diffidence and defiance—"is this. Malcolm claims he's perfectly all right now, he feels fine. Maybe he is okay. But the only other person we know about who's undergone the experience does seem to have suffered some sort of—well, derangement! Giving a capsule of vc to a complete stranger: can you call that rational? Quite apart from the question of using himself as a guineapig!"

Once more Kneller and Randolph exchanged meaningful looks. The latter said, "We're not certain he did dose himself deliberately. You see, the supportive medium we use to—to breed, vc, as it were, is volatile, and though we maintain strict precautions it's true that Dr. Post opened the sealed vats several times as often as anybody else. Just one faulty filtermask could have allowed a threshold quantity to be inhaled."

"So you know there is a threshold quantity," Malcolm said.

"Yes, we've demonstrated it with rats, chickens, hamsters . . . It's tiny. Of the order of a few million

molecules."

"Proportionately, would it be larger or smaller in the case of a human being?"

Randolph hesitated. "Conceivably, smaller. In view of our more complex nervous systems."

He took a gulp of his half-forgotten beer. "But there's another reason for assuming Maurice inhaled vc by accident, even though he did later—ah—abstract a sample from the lab, a possible sign of derangement one must concede. You see, he was always meticulous about his research work. We've turned over his home, his office, his lab, and found no trace of any record of his experiences. Even if he had decided to experiment on himself without telling us, which I can't accept, it would have been foreign to his character not to leave a detailed day-by-day description of the consequences."

"It's still possible one may be found," Kneller grunted. "Right this minute our Institute is infested with—"

"Wilfred, you're not supposed to talk about that!" Randolph snapped.

"The hell with them. I hate their guts, and in particular I hate that smarmy time-serving boot-licker Gifford! *He* has no right to call himself a scientist!"

"Let me guess," Malcolm said. "You've been invaded by government investigators? Ministry of Defence?"

"Home Office . . . or so they claim. In fact I think you may well

be right. At any rate they have all the nastier habits of the trained security man. Currently they're looking for records Maurice might have left at a secret address in our computers, and our work is at a standstill. It's all we can do to keep the test animals fed."

There was a pause. Eventually Malcolm said, "Wasn't there mention in the papers of a note which Dr. Post left?"

Kneller nodded. "A weirder farrago of rubbish you never saw. That's why I'm so relieved—I really am—to find you so . . . Well, rational!"

"Do you happen to have a copy?" Malcolm murmured.

Slightly sheepish, Kneller felt in his pocket. "As a matter of fact, I did manage to make a photostat. I've spent half Christmas puzzling over it, and I'm no wiser. Here."

Malcolm took the sheet of paper he was offered, glanced at it, and passed it to Ruth. Having read it more slowly, she exclaimed, "Why, it's like something out of *Finnegans Wake*!"

"Right! Professor, Dr. Post *did* leave a record of his experience—at any rate, as complete a record as he thought would be necessary, knowing that with total recall he could later compile as detailed an analysis as anyone might wish for. And here it is. Not a farrago of rubbish, but the result of trying to condense scores of different levels of experience—real and vicarious—into the narrowest possible compass. Language isn't designed to

carry that kind of load. Not ordinary language, anyhow."

Kneller, frowning, retrieved the paper, and after another reading of it sighed, reaching for his drink.

"On that I'll have to take your word. There's another and I think more important point. If our reasoning is correct, and Maurice inhaled vc accidentally at the outset, the fact stands that he did later steal some from the Institute and hid it in gelatine capsules to make it look like his asthma remedy, and gave some to you. Not altogether, as your friend remarked, a rational pattern of behaviour! So we've invoked the aid of Dr. Campbell. As well as being Dr. Post's GP, he was a personal friend of his, and he was among the first people, outside the Institute, to learn about vc. Even now not many people know about it. Its existence has been efficiently hushed up. The one reporter who got to Maurice's landlady seized on a garbled reference to it, but the old lady, thank goodness, failed to catch half of what we were saying and misrepeated the remainder! So when you mentioned it on the phone, we—well, we guessed something like this *might* have happened, even though we didn't think it was very likely. And it's a miracle to find that we can talk to, and study, someone in the early stages of—uh—infection, as it were."

"Infection?" Ruth echoed.

Kneller licked his lips. "I can't think what other word to use. vc is a replicant, you know, not a drug."

"I *didn't* know!" Ruth sat sharply forward. "You mean this stuff is actually breeding inside Malcolm's body? You mean it's going to take him over?" Her face twisted with horror.

"No fear of that!" Randolph exclaimed. "We know from our lab tests that there's a stable optimum population for each species we've studied so far. We have no reason to imagine humans will be affected differently. But of course we must give Mr. Fry physical as well as psychological examinations. And owing to the situation Professor Kneller mentioned we can't simply take him to our own labs. So we've asked Dr. Campbell whether he's willing to . . ." He betrayed a trace of embarrassment. "Well, hide the results for the time being, to be blunt. In the medical records computer at his clinic."

"And I've said yes," Hector put in.

"Why in the world?" Ruth demanded.

"It's hard to explain, but . . . Mr. Fry, while you were talking to Dr. Post, did he mention his conviction that there is bound to be another world war?"

"Yes, repeatedly."

"The professor and I have been trying to work out why, regardless of Christmas, the government should think it worth assigning a dozen top investigators to ransack our labs, and why they won't allow vc to be mentioned in connection with Dr. Post's murder."

"I've been wondering about

that," Malcolm said. "They must have envenomed it, then."

Ruth looked at him blankly.

"N-N-I," he amplified. "What they used to call a D notice. Stands for 'not in the national interest'."

"Correct," Kneller said. "And there's something else. They haven't involved the police, as you might expect in a case of murder. The barely colorable excuse they're offering is that they want to make sure no public funds were misapplied to the vc project when we were working on a Ministry of Defence contract last year. Nothing military. Had to do with extracting antibiotic concentrate from a fungus."

"It follows," Malcolm said softly, "that the government must agree with Dr. Post."

Kneller wiped his face. "We think so. And consider what a trump card vc would be if you could safely give it to your entire general staff!"

"It goes deeper," Malcolm said after a moment's thought. "Not just your general staff. But the elite among the handful of survivors. You could literally divide mankind, from birth, into an upper and a lower class."

"Lord, I didn't think of that one!" Kneller whispered, turning pale. "But it would be of a piece with the rest, wouldn't it?"

Randolph shuddered. "Having met Charkall-Phelps, I can just imagine someone like him putting that into practice. Mr. Fry, that makes it all the more important for

you as our sole human subject—”

“Of course I’ll co-operate,” Malcolm interrupted. “As to being the sole human subject, though . . . Professor, you mentioned a supportive medium that vc thrives in. Is there only one suitable medium?”

“No, dozens. But the one we use gives the best yield so far attained. Maurice designed it himself, incidentally. Why?”

“Could it survive in human plasma under blood-bank conditions?”

Randolph frowned. “Plasma we never actually tested. It would have been prohibitively expensive. You know it’s so scarce the Ministry of Health has been buying from abroad?”

Malcolm gave a wry smile. “Yes, I heard about that.”

“In principle, though . . . Hector, what temperature do they store plasma at?”

“About four degrees, I believe.”

“In that case I think the answer would be yes. Though I’d have to run a computer simulation to be certain. It probably wouldn’t replicate to any significant extent, but it definitely wouldn’t be inactivated. Why?”

Malcolm drew a deep breath. He looked extremely unhappy.

“I’m about to make Ruth furious with me. Darling, I didn’t tell you, but when I was waiting to bring Billy back from the clinic I discovered they’re paying blood-donors now, and since the taxi had cost so much—well, guess the rest.”

“Oh, no!” Ruth whispered.

“I’m O positive, so they said mine would go straight to the plasma centrifuge. It’s a continuous-throughput model you have, isn’t it, Dr. Campbell? I read about it in the local paper when it was installed. So there’s a chance my halflitre may have been so diluted that no recipient could be given a threshold dose. If not . . . well, vc must already be loose in the world. Beyond recall.”

XI

“BROTHER VAL!”

Glancing up from the biography of Chaka Zulu which by a miracle he had found in the hospital’s library list, Valentine Crawford thought for a moment that it was one of the hospital’s many black nurses who had parted the curtains around his bed. The doctor in charge claimed they’d been put there because for no apparent reason he had slept for more than two days and they’d been worried. He suspected the real explanation was that white men in the adjacent beds had complained about the presence of a black.

—Not that I give a damn. I need privacy and the chance to concentrate. The way my mind’s working, I’m almost dizzy!

Abruptly he realised the girl peering in was Cissy, and with her—

“Dad!”

—six-year-old Toussaint in person, letting fall a drawing-book that fluttered to the floor like a

dying bird as he rushed to greet his father.

"Careful, son!" Valentine cried, fending the boy off with his right arm. A transfusion-tube was taped to the left one, and he had had eighteen stitches in the knife-wound across his belly. The buckra who carved him had obviously not meant him to make such a good recovery. Or any recovery.

Laughing, Cissy captured the kid, sat down, and perched him on her knee. She was looking marvellous today; her coat of bright orange trimmed with white was old, but the brilliant colours suited her to perfection.

"Your mam been looking after him, right?" Valentine said.

"No, me!" Cissy countered in surprise. "They didn't tell you?"

"I thought your mam" Valentine licked his broad lips. "See, I was half-unconscious when they brought me in, but I explained he was there on his own, over and over to make sure they knew what I was saying, and gave your phone-number, and then after the operation I didn't wake up for the longest time, you know?"

"Sure, I heard. Kind of weird! Got us all worried. But the minute I learnt the news I went and got that key you had cut so we could go in and study up in your books, and there he was squalling his head off, and though I got him calmed down in a little he wouldn't come back with me to mam's, so"—shrugging—"I just kind of moved in. Hope you don't mind." She

rumpled the boy's hair. "He's okay now. He's fine."

"I like Cissy, dad!" Toussaint said. "She gives me nice things." He dug in the pocket of the anorak he was wearing, dark with damp from the snow which was sifting down beyond the windows, and produced a carton of coloured pencils. "She gave me these, and a drawing-book, and I brought lots of pictures to show you!"

Remembering he'd dropped the book, he scrambled down to retrieve it. Smiling, Valentine laid aside his own reading and prepared to be impressed by his son's masterpieces.

"*Chaka Zulu*," Cissy read out, leaning to see what Valentine had been passing the time with. "Oh, yeah. I never read about him, but I guess you mentioned him in class."

"Mm-hm," Valentine said absently. "A great man. A genius." He interspersed his words with admiring comments on the polychrome scrawls Toussaint was displaying. "It tells in there how the first time he met explorers from Europe who tried to persuade him the world was round, he made up off the top of his head all the same arguments about it being flat that the Vatican experts had used only a couple of centuries before to put down Giordano Bruno and Galileo. And he didn't even know how to read and write! He must have been brilliant."

Mouth ajar, Cissy shook her head. "Who was this Bruno? And who was—? I guess I didn't catch

the other name."

—Shouldn't have expected that to register. After all she is in my class instead of at a regular school because she got sick of being told only what's proper for a black kid to know. When I was her age, did they tell me about important thinkers like Galileo? Let alone Chaka!

Aloud he said with a sigh, "Remind me to talk about him when I get better. It'll tie in with how the South Africans are making the Bantu as stupid as they want them to be by deporting them to land that's half desert. It's the only way known to reduce intelligence; you deprive kids of protein before they're four years old, the brain doesn't develop right. Before the whites came along, though, the Zulus at any rate were capable of producing a genius like Chaka. Must have scared the shit out of Whitey to run across him!"

And he added to his son who had turned the last used page of his book, "Hey, that's very good. That's great. Say, do you mind if I draw a picture in your book?"

"Yes please!" Toussaint cried.

"Give me a pencil, then—no, a black one . . . Thanks." Spreading the book out flat, he started to sketch on the next clean sheet.

"I guess they didn't catch the bastard who cut me yet?" he added to Cissy under his breath.

"Shit, no! Don't think they even looked for him. Not seriously."

"Did you tell—*him*—what happened?"

"Sure I did. Remembered what you said: don't let the buckras get away with anything."

"A bad white man stuck a knife in your tummy!" Toussaint declared.

"Ah . . . Yeah, I'm afraid that's only too true," Valentine muttered. "Well, if the fuzz won't look for him, the brothers and sisters will have to. There he is." He held up the drawing-book. In less than a minute he had produced a portrait of a man with a sharp chin, deep-set eyes, one ear sticking out more than the other, and a broken nose.

"I didn't know you could draw!" Cissy exclaimed.

"Let me see, let me see!" Toussaint demanded, but Valentine held the book out of his reach.

"No more did I." His tone reflected faint surprise. "It's just that I can remember that face clear as my father's. I only caught a glimpse of him, but . . . Well, do you know him?"

"Couldn't mistake him in a million years," Cissy said positively. "Runs a shop near my home. Mam doesn't let me buy things there any more. Mean son-of-a-bitch keeps black people waiting twice as long as anyone else!"

She hesitated. "You're sure he's the one? It's kind of dark on those stairs at your place."

"I couldn't be more certain if I lived to be as old as Methusaleh."

"Right!" She tore the sheet out of the book, ignoring Toussaint's objections, folded it, put it in the pocket of her coat. "We'll look

after him!"

"You do that small thing," Valentine said grimly. "And make sure he knows why— Hey, son, don't cry! I'll draw another picture specially for you, with lots of pretty colours instead of just black and white!"

"AH, STEVENS!"

Here was Lieutenant Cordery, the smart young officer—younger by six months than Stevens himself, as the latter had learned when sneaking a look at a personnel file he wasn't meant to read—who had been leading the patrol when the chopper-bomb came down. Accompanying him, but hovering in the background, was a civilian in a tweed suit glancing from one to another of the many shields ranked along the wall. This was Rathcanar Military Hospital, on the Scottish border, and every ward was decorated with the arms and colours of regiments whose soldiers had been treated here. Crests and swatches of tartan succeeded one another in dizzying array.

"How are you coming along? All right?" Cordery continued as he perched gingerly on a corner of Stevens' bed. "I see you're still having to be pumped up, ha-ha!"—with a jerk of his thumb at the plasma-flask hung from a bracket beside the bed-head—"but the MO tells me that can be withdrawn this afternoon, so I've come to enlist your co-operation, if you feel up to it. You see . . ."

He felt in the side-pocket of his

uniform jacket and produced a wad of news-cuttings. "You see, as the first soldier actually to be—uh—injured in the Glasgow disturbances, you made the papers in rather a big way."

"Thanks, I know," Stevens said in a dull voice.

Momentarily disconcerted, Cordery put the cuttings away. Then, with a shrug, he turned to his civilian companion.

"Mr. McPhee, perhaps you'd explain?"

Briskening, the civilian approached with a broad smile. "Lance-Corporal Stevens! Glad to hear how well you're getting on. I'm from Anglo-Caledonian Television, and I've come to organise a segment of our evening magazine programme. I don't expect you've had much chance to watch TV since you came north, of course"—a chuckle—"but you must know the sort of thing. And the point, really, is that now the strikers in Glasgow are turning to terrorism, like their opposite numbers out there in Italy . . . You've heard about the things that are going on in Turin and Milan? Yes? Shocking, isn't it? *Dreadful!* Well, we think, anyhow, that it's high time to provide a proper balance by interviewing someone who's suffered at their hands, and show that we are down-right determined to stop the rot in Britain, at least, even if those Eye-ties can't manage it! We only have time to talk to one of you lads, because there's only six minutes for the whole slot, so since—as the

lieutenant just said—your name was in the headlines quite a lot as a result of your *most* unfortunate experience, if you feel up to it . . . ?” A wave of one well-manicured hand completed the sentence.

“Yes, sir!” Stevens said. “Never been on the telly. Always fancied the idea!”

“Fine!” McPhee exclaimed. “We’ll be here at six twenty-six exactly, then.”

At which time, minus thirty seconds or so, a camera trolleyed down the ward in the wake of McPhee speaking in hushed tones to a hand microphone. Having lingered on several beds whose occupants were too badly hurt to offer more response than a thumbs-up sign, the operator turned finally to Stevens.

“And here,” McPhee said solemnly, “is Lance-Corporal Dennis Stevens, who was so tragically injured in the line of duty by a vicious so-called chopper-bomb. Corporal, perhaps you’d like to tell our viewers what you think of the unknown criminals who did this to you.” Beaming, he leaned close.

“Well, I don’t know too much about them, do I?” Stevens said clearly. “Bar one thing, of course.”

“What’s that?” McPhee prompted.

“They must have more sense and guts than I have. I let myself be driven into the army, didn’t I, when I got sick of hanging around the Labour for a job that wasn’t there? And what do I get for signing on? I get my balls cut off, that’s what!”

McPhee, in sudden panic, made to withdraw the mike, but he was slow to react and Stevens snatched it from him and shouted, “Don’t shut me up—I haven’t finished! What’s a ruddy chopper-bomb compared to one of these H-bombs they got ready and waiting to fry the lot of us? Think they wouldn’t use ‘em? I seen the buggers that would, quick as a wink! Soon as I can walk I’m going to quit the army, and let’s see ‘em court-martial this phoney hero for desertion—won’t that be a giggle, hm? Hero be damned! I’m just a poor bugger who couldn’t get a proper job! Gang of fucking tear-aways, that’s all the army is, only in it you get paid for bashing people about while my mates back home who done the same on a private-enterprise basis got flung in jail ‘cause they did it without waiting till they were ordered to! You stupid sheep, you—!”

At which point they finally managed to cut him off.

WHITE AND SHAKING after a violent dressing-down from his colonel, Cordery said to the MO in charge of the ward, “A medical discharge right away, of course. I’m still not certain how much of what he said was actually broadcast, but—”

“But whoever decided to transmit the interview live instead of recording it,” the MO snapped, “deserves to be hanged, drawn and quartered!”

“Yes.” Cordery licked his lips. “No doubt a court of inquiry. . . .

But there is one point."

"What?"

"Was Stevens—well—literal about his injuries?"

"As a matter of fact, he was."

"Oh." Cordery shuddered, and it cost him a visible effort of will not to put his hand to his crotch. "I see. In that case I suppose there's *some* excuse for him."

"There is no excuse," the MO said flatly, "for a soldier to resent being injured in the line of duty. That's what he lets himself in for when he enlists. If Stevens didn't realise, it was his own stupid fault. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm very busy. After today's confrontation with the strikers, I have twenty-four casualties to attend to."

XII

"**W**AIT OUTSIDE, PLEASE," David Sawyer said to the young constable on duty in the private ward where they were keeping Harry Bott. Not that there was much chance of him running away. A splinter of glass had cut a major artery in his thigh, and he was still on a plasma drip.

Sawyer had got off lighter, but not by much. He had stitches in his scalp and right biceps, and one of his hospital-issue slippers was twice the size of the other to make room for a thick dressing. Apart from residual tenderness, though, he felt fine. He had slept the clock around three times, for no accountable reason, and he'd woken with his mind clear as spring water.

"What do you want?" Harry said, glancing up from the magazine he was reading. "Your oppo Sergeant Epton was in already—isn't one of you jacks enough for today?"

"Yes, I know Brian's been here," Sawyer said, taking the chair the constable had been using and dragging it awkwardly towards the bed. "In fact it's because of something he just told me that I've come calling." He sat down.

"You're wasting your time. Like you said, it was a fair cop. That much I can't argue about, but it stops there." Harry's round face darkened. "I don't know who turned you on to the tickle, but I have my susses, and after I've done my bird I'll sort him out. Better still, have him taken care of while I'm inside. I know how I can set it up without you pinning it on me!"

"You mean by getting Joe Feathers to attend to it?" Sawyer suggested. "No, that won't work. While you're doing your bird, your precious brother-in-law will be porridging too, and if I can swing the deal he'll be in the same stir, and what's more he'll know it was you who put him away."

He curled his lip into a consciously sinister grin and crossed his arms on his chest.

"What *are* you running on about?"

"I'll explain. When you were planning the Rexwell job, you needed someone to carry heavy crates. So you borrowed Chas Verity from Joe—without telling

him, I'm sure, because if you had told him you'd have had to cut him in, and Joe isn't the type to be satisfied with a tip, is he? All I need do, then, is let the word loose close enough to Joe for him to hear, before we nick him, that he's sitting out his tenner because you were greedy."

Harry preserved a sullen silence.

"Don't you want to know how I can pin a tenner on Joe—thanks to you?" Sawyer waited until he saw by a fractional twitch of Harry's eyes that the bait had been taken. "I'll tell you. Accessory to murder! And if you don't cough, I'll send you up for accessory after instead of a regular B-and-E!"

"What the hell makes you think I could cough about a murder?" There was alarm in Harry's voice. "And anyway, who's dead?"

"His name was Post. Dr. Maurice Post."

"You mean that scientist geezer they found in Kentish Town? I read about him in the papers. But that's not on my turf, nor anywhere near it!"

"No more is Rexwell Radio. You were never one to mess on your own doorstep, which is why you've got away from us so often. But it's bang next door to Joe's manor, isn't it? And . . . Well, I saw the body. I can just about picture the man who attacked him. Tall, like about six-four, and heavy, like seventeen or eighteen stone, and rather stupid, so that after he'd done his victim in he'd beat him another couple of times for luck. I can even imagine

what Post was hit with. Likely, one of those detachable handles they use for hydraulic jacks, a steel bar about a yard long and an inch thick. Sorry! I mean two centimetres by a metre, don't I? And most of Joe's frighteners are carried on the books at that car-breaker's yard in Finchley. You know that! What weight did Chas wrestle at, Harry? Heavy, wasn't it?"

Harry lay there staring.

"And we all know he's been Joe's right fist since he quit the ring—just the person Joe would tell to sort out a stranger peddling pills on private turf."

"Pills? I don't know anything about pills!"

"Ah, but Joe does, and what's more so does my oppo Sergeant Epton. That's what we were talking about when he came to say hello after his chat with you. You say you read about Post's death. So you know where he was the night before he died! In the Hampstead Arms! There's a bit of history attached to that pub, isn't there? A few years back some of Joe's pushers were getting ruddy blatant in there—and on his front step at that, because he lives only just up the road. Well, that's taken care of, but we keep up our contacts by way of insurance, and someone we believe says he saw one of Joe's boys in there as well as Post the night he died. And to top the lot, he says he saw Post showing off a batch of pills . . . and Joe's man was standing right beside him."

He leaned back. "So I read the

situation this way. Joe's boyo phoned in and said something to the effect, here's this amateur moving on to our patch and we can't have that, and the usual car-load of frighteners rolled up and when Post left the pub they—ah—impressed him with the villainy of his trespassing."

"Never took no interest in Joe's business," Harry muttered.

"Try convincing a jury of that. I'll tell you how it'll look to them. We nicked Chas on a job with you. It follows that when he's not working for Joe he's one of yours. We're going to break him because he's stupid. *You* know how thick he is. Far too thick for any court to believe he'd do something as enterprising as beating up a famous scientist unless he was told to. All of which spells accessory after!"

He gave a faint chuckle. "Come on, Harry. As a good Catholic, you've never approved of Joe's dealing. And when a discreet cough could make the difference between the ten you'd pull down this way, and—oh—five at most for breaking and entering, even less if you have the sense to cop good behaviour . . . Well?"

He could almost see the logic of the argument working itself out behind Harry's eyes. But when the other finally spoke, what he said startled him.

"You win, damn you! I knew Chas must have something on his mind, the way he was acting . . . But there's one condition."

"Try me. No promises, but try

me."

"It's Vee. My wife." Harry was twisting and untwisting his fingers. "She's got another baby coming. And she's not been feeling too well. If anything happens to her while I'm inside—well, the kids'd be put in care, wouldn't they? I was in care when I was Patrick's age, and that was *hell*!"

Sawyer waited.

"So make sure she gets seen by a doctor. A good one. Of course, I've been telling her she has to put up with it, that's a woman's work in the world, bearing kids and bringing 'em up . . . But if I'm going to be in stir—well, I want you to make sure whatever has to be done gets done to make sure she's around even if I'm not."

"Do you mean that—?" Sawyer began.

"I know what you're going to say! What will Father Grady think if the doctor says she mustn't have the new one? Well, *damn* Father Grady! What use is a mother who's too sick to take care of the kids she already has?"

Curiously touched, Sawyer said, "It's a bargain. You do realise it won't be as easy as it would have been ten years ago? But I'll do my best. That's a promise."

"ARE YOU *sure* it's all right for Brother Bradshaw to speak tonight?" Lady Washgrave asked for the tenth time.

The doctor who had taken charge of the injured evangelist at the London Clinic (of course! No

wicked socialised medicine for *him*!) smiled, likewise for the tenth time, and repeated his previous assurance.

"The wound was really far less serious than it appeared, even though he still does have to wear a sling on that arm. Naturally it bled freely, so we gave him a transfusion for safety's sake, but if anything I'm sure he must be fitter now than when he arrived. You know he slept for two whole days? He must have been utterly exhausted!"

His smile was becoming a trifle glassy by now. Seizing his chance to change the subject, he added, "You must be delighted with the way things are going!"

"Oh, yes!" Lady Washgrave agreed. "There's little doubt the tide has turned our way at last."

To launch the New Year's Crusade she had booked the Albert Hall with its seven thousand seats, overruling her timid committee who feared that hangovers from last night's party-going would prevent people from attending. Despite the chill sleet spattering the streets, the hall was nearly full with ten minutes to go before the starting-time. And some of the vacant places would be occupied by people currently shivering under umbrellas in the hope of glimpsing Brother Bradshaw as he drove up.

Catching sight of Tarquin through the throng of notables awaiting their signal to adjourn to the dais—the Home Secretary, a bishop, actors, writers, singers, the chairman of an international cor-

poration, and lesser lights who by contributing generously had acquired the status of Patrons of the Campaign—she inquired anxiously, "Have there been any disturbances?"

She was always afraid there might be, and when there were she felt physically ill. Her ideal act of Christian witness was Harvest Festival in an old village church on a placid autumn day. Events on this grand a scale ran the risk of counter-demonstrations, not merely from militant atheists and communists but more horribly—from Christian extremists, Pentecostals and Anti-Popery fanatics.

"Nothing to speak of, milady," Tarquin assured her. "The police have the crowd well in hand."

"They'd certainly better improve on their performance at the airport," Lady Washgrave said tartly. "Granted, Mr Charkall-Phelps apologised personally for that fiasco, but when one thinks of the BBC newscasters raking over all that dirt . . . !" She clenched her fists.

"But it backfired, milady! They wound up making him look like the Prodigal Returned, didn't they? I mean, half the young people here tonight must have sampled drugs, and as for—well, sexual irregularities . . . !" He blushed like a little boy, one of the characteristics which had endeared him to her. "Knowing he's tasted the fleshpots, they're that much more eager to hear why he returned to the fold!"

Before Lady Washgrave could reply, muffled by the walls but still

fierce enough to carry to their ears there arose a mighty yell of acclamation.

"Judging by that," Lady Washgrave said, "it sounds as though you're perfectly right, Tarquin dear. Ask the Home Secretary and the Bishop to join me in welcoming Brother Bradshaw, please!"

TEN MINUTES LATER, to the accompaniment of a roaring hymn led by a choir that had come by bus all the way from Merthyr Tydfil, they assembled on the platform under a huge neon cross and Lady Washgrave gazed out with satisfaction over the ranks of the faithful. Or, perhaps, the would-be faithful. Either way, it was gratifying to see the hall so packed.

—I do hope none of them came here in the hope of further scandalous revelations!

While greeting Brother Bradshaw, she had caught a glimpse of a banner wielded by a servant of Satan, which cried in huge yellow letters SCREW LADY WASHGRAVE, SHE NEEDS IT BADLY . . . but a burly constable had hurled its bearer to the wet flagstones.

So now everything was in the lap of—ah—The Deity.

SHE TRIED NOT TO PREEN at the compliments paid her by Charkall-Phelps, who had generously consented to chair the meeting, nor to feel put out at the far longer time he spent talking about Brother Bradshaw, at the mention of whose name such a storm of applause

broke out one expected him to rise and bow; however, he acknowledged the tribute with a mere nod.

"How admirably modest he is!" Tarquin whispered from the row behind where the officials of the Campaign were seated. Strictly, he was not in that category, but she had organised an exception to the rule in view of his devoted services.

Then Charkall-Phelps invited the bishop to offer a prayer of dedication, and relinquished him the place of honour. Lady Washgrave closed her eyes, preparing to enjoy the prelate's resonant delivery; he was accounted one of the finest public speakers in the Church of England.

After an impressive pause, his baritone voice rang out.

"Lord God of Hosts, behold Your army, mustered against the horde of evil in response to the trumpets of righteousness! We, poor and unworthy servants of Christ—"

"Now that's dishonest for a start!"

Lady Washgrave snapped her eyelids apart. That comment had been made within range of a live microphone, and in an American accent!

—Heaven forbid the stewards should have let some of those terrible extremists sneak in!

But it was no fanatic her gaze encountered. It was Brother Bradshaw! And in the body of the hall practically everyone's eyes had been on him!

The bishop's, naturally, had not. Unused to interruptions, he was blinking in bewilderment.

"Did you call yourself a 'poor servant of Christ'?" Bradshaw said now, very loudly and clearly. "*Poor*, hm? Well, I happen to know you pulled down sixty thousand pounds last year!"

Lady Washgrave felt the world collapse as the bishop gasped and swung around.

"And the 'unworthy' bit, too!" Bradshaw pursued. "I don't believe it—and neither do you! I've seldom met anyone smugger or more pompous!"

By now the audience was trembling like a mountain in the penumbra of an earthquake zone. Thoroughly flummoxed, the bishop was hanging on to the rostrum with one hand, to steady himself.

"What's more!" Bradshaw barked. "That bit you started with about the Lord of Hosts! *My God* isn't a man of war! He's the Prince of Peace!"

"Is he drunk or—or crazy?" Tarquin whimpered.

"I don't know!" wailed Lady Washgrave. "But look down there, look at the reporters!" She pointed at the press table; everyone seated at it was grinning broadly.

"Shut up!" someone called from high at the back of the hall.

"No! No!" An answering chorus broke out. "That's Brother Bradshaw! We came to hear Brother Bradshaw!"

"Uh—stewards?" Charkall-Phelps said uncertainly to the

microphone before his chair. But the stewards, mostly husky rugger-playing medical students, were glancing helplessly from side to side as the commotion spread.

"Silence!" Regaining his presence of mind, the bishop bent his full episcopal wrath on Bradshaw. "Kindly tell me what you've taken exception to in the prayer I had barely begun to offer!"

"You called us an army!" Bradshaw snapped. "Armies kill! They burn, they pillage, they destroy! They follow orders blindly, to My Lai, to Lidice, countless abominations! You're not an army!" He spun to face the crowd.

"Or if you are, you have nothing to do with the goodness of God! I've been lying in the hospital these past few days—you heard about that? And do you know what I've been thinking about? Do you imagine I've been praying for mercy because I once got stoned and screwed a groupie whose mother didn't have the sense to put her on the Pill?"

There was an awful hush. His listeners weren't here expecting such terms to be used in public by the world's most highly-paid evangelist.

"No, I've been praying for forgiveness because I've been telling lies!" Bradshaw shouted. "Hypocrisy! *That's* the sin against the Holy Spirit! I've been worse than that smug bugger of a bishop—more like the money-changers in the Temple! To sit back in my plush Hollywood home and tell the poor

their plight is a punishment for their sins—that was evil! To bless the tools of war—I've done that, and it was wicked! There isn't a sinner in the hall with more on his conscience than I have, unless it's this bunch of bastards up here on the platform with me!"

By now he had shouldered the bishop aside from the main microphone, and to everyone in the hall it carried the sound as a sudden awful gust of agony broke from his diaphragm.

There were people present who had never heard a grown man sob before.

"Help me!" he forced out. "Oh, Lord, help me! If You ever pitied a

man, help me now!"

With a wild swing of his unbanded arm he swept the microphone to the floor, jumped from the rostrum and ran pellmell for an exit. No one was quick enough to intercept him. By the time the stewards had collected their wits, he had vanished.

"Well," Tarquin exclaimed. "At least it's a mercy we didn't get the live television coverage you were hoping for, milady!"

"Oh, shut up, you bloody fool!" snarled Lady Washgrave. "You and your Prodigal Returned . . . !"

—TO BE CONCLUDED—

—JOHN BRUNNER

The Gods (cont. from page 40)
on the plain impressing the hell out of everyone, even my sons. I'll go out there in a minute and give them this recorder with a formal resignation from the spacer's union.

I'm going to stay here. My roots are here now. I've got sons and sons of sons. I have some beautiful great-grand-daughters and married two or three of them off to princes in Jullia and Xeron. Next week I'm dispatching a cute little wink off to a Filorian princeling and that will just about cement my power structure.

I enjoy it here. I have a villa on the Scarlet Sea and another in the Markos Mountains, overlooking a beautiful lake dotted with little temple islands.

Kor is dead, dying gracefully of old age, hoary with honors and dignity. Most of the nubile that

helped me at Bazra are grandmothers. I'm still fairly young, by spacer standards, and I have a lot of projects that I want to see completed before I die. There's the Jullary dam and the *tazeel* research. And I'm about to become a great-great-grandfather for the first time.

So I won't be coming back. It's rather nice being a god, as long as you don't have to make religion a dominant thing. Now that I've got the University really going they'll find that all out for themselves. Already they're talking about me in less than reverent terms.

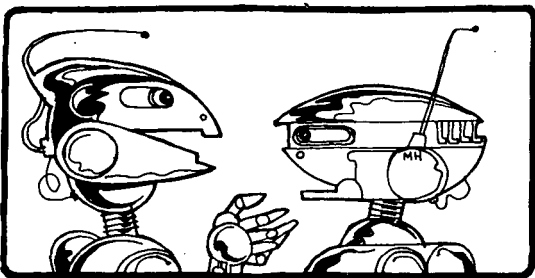
But tell the Traders Guild that *tazeel* is really something very special, if they'd like to have a ship drop by now and again.

Tell them to ask for me. I won't be hard to find.

—WILLIAM ROTSLER

ED
SMITH

the Clubhouse



THINGS ARE SOMEWHAT FRAGMENTED in fanzine publishing these days. In the past, certain trends have dominated the field for brief periods, and there were a few fanzines that most considered the leading fanzines of the time. This is no longer true, and opinions vary as to whether this means we are passing through a fallow period of fanzine publishing, or there is simply more healthy diversity in today's zines. Whatever the case, I have been receiving a wide assortment of different types of fanzines, and in this column I will review a few of these. In the reviews and the listings, I am rating all fanzines on a scale of one to ten, with one being utterly unredeemable and ten being the pinnacle of excellence.

GRANFALLOON #16, Linda and Ron Bushyager, 1614 Evans Ave., Prospect Park, Pa. 19076; 75¢, 3/\$2.00; irregular, mimeographed with offset covers and folio; December, 1972, 44 pp.

Granfalloon has always been a "middle of the road" fanzine—one that has been filled neither with humorous articles nor material about science fiction, but has attempted to print all kinds of fanzine writing. In the past, *Gf* has printed such diverse items as fanishness by Bob Tucker, the first two chapters from a science fiction juvenile by Ted White, book and fanzine reviews, and a regular series of handsome portfolios by some of the most talented artists in fandom.

There is something for everyone, but it is

also possible that not everyone will like everything in any issue. For example, I could have done without the cooking column, although Linda says she received a good response on the first installment, so someone must be interested. This issue also has no strong lead articles, so it tends to lack cohesion and comes across as "just another issue of *Granfalloon*." It also lacks a distinctive editorial personality, and presents itself more as a collection of writing and art than as a good strong fanzine.

However, there is good material in this issue. I was particularly impressed with Joelle Brink's fine contribution, "Metamorphosis on a Theme by Burgess"—that rarity in fanzine writing, a well-written, well-thought-out original critical essay. Joelle gets immediately into the themes and philosophy of *A Clockwork Orange*, both book and film, pointing out the differences between the Burgess and Kubrick versions. Most fanzine book and film reviews are merely recountings of the plot, or brief mentions, but Joelle takes the time to do justice to the subject matter. You may not agree with his interpretation, but he provides plenty of food for thought. This is one of the best essays I've seen in a fanzine in quite a while.

On the lighter side, Mike Glicksohn contributes a tale of woe about crossing over the Canadian border to attend American science fiction conventions, where he finds the Canadian authorities search *everything*.

including tuna fish sandwiches and personal letters. It's an amusing piece, with a very good illustration by Steve Stiles. Also in a humorous vein is Ginger Buchanan's "Jam Today," in which she reveals her Desire To Win A Hugo Award. She develops the idea well and with a good deal of humor. It's an enjoyable, informally-written article; though I admit to being a little puzzled about her transformation on the last page into a fuzzy Koala bear.

Artist Jim McLeod's work is featured on the front and back covers, and in a four-page interior folio. Jim has been drawing very good science-fictional artwork for several years now, and it is good to see him in the spotlight in this issue of *Granfalloon* with his fantastic landscapes and futuristic spaceships.

Jeff Glencannon, who has a regular column about fanzines, talks about the many recent discussions in the fan press concerning the desirability of elaborate layout in fanzines and gives his views on the subject. I find his attitude refreshing: he enjoys good layout and graphics, but he is a bit tired of all the attention paid to those areas lately. He's also aware that not every fanzine editor can afford the equipment necessary for such experimentation, and most lack the knowledge to do it well. I do expect some of the neofans and potential publishers of today are a bit scared of publishing their own zines when they look at several of the more elaborate fanzines of today. Older types (such as Glencannon) remember the days when all that was necessary to produce a fanzine that would look as good as 90% of what was coming out was a workable mimeograph, a typewriter, some stencils and large amounts of correction fluid.

Although Linda complains that this issue's letters did not lend themselves to easy editing, the letter column is quite interesting and well-edited, as usual. It also benefits from the attractive layout and excellent mimeography that is evident throughout the fanzine. Lettercolumnists mainly talk about a record review of the Jefferson Starship

album and the fanzine reviews, both from the previous issue, and demonstrate a wide range of opinion.

Rating . . . 6

OUTWORLDS #15, Bill and Joan Bowers, Box 354, Wadsworth, Ohio, 44281; 75¢; irregular, mimeo and offset; January, 1973, 80 pp.

Each issue of *Outworlds* is unique. Each issue does something at least slightly different in the way of layout, so that no two issues have the exact same "feel." This issue is largely produced on that old fannish stalwart, the mimeograph, but with some of the illustrations bound into the issue on separate pieces of paper, and the front and back covers are offset foldouts on thick sheets that resemble cardboard. The table of contents appears both on the elaborate foldout cover and on a separate sheet that can be used as a bookmark. And a large portion of the issue consists of a bound-in "book." Bill Bowers refers to this issue in his editorial as "the largest chunk of his life that Bowers has ever devoted to any one thing." The time and attention Bill and Joan have lavished on the issue is noticeable, not only in the obvious flourishes, but in the small details as well. The layout is crisp and clean, and the issue presents a fine overall visual appearance.

The material is more uneven. The most obvious criticism of this type of fanzine (and one that I've heard often) is that the material isn't nearly as good as the layout. This is true to a certain extent of this issue of *Outworlds*, though the material here is generally much better than that in some of the other more elaborate fanzines. There is some fine offbeat material that would not find a home in most fanzines, and it goes along well with the distinctive and unusual "feel" of the magazine itself.

The first written contribution in the issue is called "Behind the Golden Bookcase," by one "Handy Book" ("translated by J. R. Christopher"). You'll enjoy this one if you read it as good crazy fun. Also somewhat

out of the ordinary is a small folio of cartoons by a new fan artist, Carleton Palmer, that include some good barbs directed at the Nixon administration.

There are also some good columns in this issue. Poul Anderson, Greg Benford and Robert A. W. Lowndes all have installments of various columns. The lettercolumn is well-edited, but there is a lack of any real discussion at the moment, except for an exchange between Lowndes and Ted White. Perhaps it's hard to get good discussions started in a fanzine which changes from one issue to the next as much as *Outworlds* does. Most of the things one could say in a letter of comment would be obsolete by the time the next issue came out.

The "bound-in book" is a collection of poetry, fiction and non-fiction by Bill Wolfenbarger. I found some of it quite interesting, but would have edited it heavily. I particularly enjoyed the short essays and letters that reveal something of Bill's personality, and like the way they have been chronologically arranged to give an ongoing account of the changes in his life; the poetry and most of the fiction struck me as not nearly as enjoyable. I can find better poetry and fiction from quite a few sources, but good personal essays are much harder to find outside of fandom.

A lot of the art this time is of the "funny alien" style that most fans associate with Tim Kirk. Many of the drawings are quite good (I particularly liked James Shull's work) but there should be more variety in the subject matter of art. There are also three of Stephen Fabian's 1940-ish science-fictional drawings. While technically more than competent, I feel he has done the same drawing before, and I think he has already exhausted this rather limited school of sf art.

Rating . . . 6

Bill Bowers also publishes INWORLDS (monthly, mimeo, around ten pages and available from the *Outworlds* address at 25¢, 5/\$1.00), which is described as a "fanzine about fanzines." It contains a good many fanzine reviews, as well as news about forth-

coming fanzines and a lettercolumn. A very good, enjoyable little thing, and I hope he keeps it up.

SANDWORM #19, Bob Vardeman, P.O. Box 11352, Albuquerque, N.M. 87112; 50¢ for a sample copy, no long-term subscriptions; irregular, mimeo and offset; undated, unnumbered pp.

At the opposite end of the scale from the large, elaborate fanzines like *Outworlds* is *Sandworm*. Although technically a "genzine" (a fanzine with articles and artwork, intended for general circulation in fandom), *Sandworm* features mostly editorial and lettercolumn, and there is little attention to graphics. So *Sandworm* more closely resembles a "personalzine" (a fanzine totally editor-written, usually sent to the editor's friends) than it does most of the genzines being published today. There aren't many outside contributors or fancy graphic trips in Bob's fanzine—you will enjoy *Sandworm* if you enjoy reading Bob Vardeman and the people who write him letters.

Bob's fanzines always have a "thrown together" look, and a little too much of it for my own tastes. It is interesting to note, however, that even such a small and unpretentious fanzine as *Sandworm* usually has an offset cover. The rest of the fanzine consists of good clear mimeography on brown paper, with an occasional illustration or unusual news clipping to break the monotony. There are also a number of one-line puns and humorous quotes. Bob dotes on puns, and the issue is filled with them, ranging from the grotesque to the ridiculous. (Where puns are concerned, I suppose that's a compliment.) He also has a wide range of other interests, so his editorial is divided into short sections that cover politics, elephants, genetics, movies and television. On the first page he reproduces a newspaper headline, "Crows Eat Trolley Wires in Bombay," which should give you some idea of the sort of thing Bob enjoys reprinting. There is also a section of editor-written book reviews of current science fiction and non-

fiction books, and the reviews are short and to the point: "If you really groove on mad scientists, you might spend 75¢. Otherwise, why bother?" In fact, Vardeman's style of writing is always simple and direct, at times even terse.

The outside contributions include some fine cartoons by Doug Lovenstein, an interesting lettercolumn, and an enjoyable article by Al Snider. In "Bell Bottom Blues" Al talks about the differences between the active fans and the people who go to conventions merely to see the films or panels and to meet their favorite writer. This is a much better article than the usual run of *Sandworm* material, and one with a lot of truth in it.

If Bob went after good articles more often, and paid a bit more attention to the appearance of his fanzine, *Sandworm* would be a substantially better fanzine. As it is, however, it is still a frequently fascinating personalzine.

Enclosed with *Sworm* #19 is *Hugoes There?*, a report of last year's World Convention, Westercon, and a regional convention in Denver. Well-written and fun.

Rating . . . 5

THE INCOMPLEAT TERRY CARR, Arnie Katz, 59 Livingston St., Apt. 6B, Brooklyn, New York, 11201; \$1.00; mimeo and offset: 60 pp.

This is not a fanzine as such, but more a fannish book. Arnie Katz and rich brown have edited this thick volume containing some of the best fannish writing of Terry Carr, who "stands high on any list of all-time great fanwriters," to quote from Arnie's introduction. The only problem in putting together a collection of Terry's best writing is that so much has to be left out. Well, this is subtitled "Volume One," and I eagerly await the second volume. Meanwhile, this is a hell of a fine publication, and one that belongs on the shelf of anyone interesting in good fanwriting.

TOMORROW AND . . . #9, Jerry Lapidus, 54,

Clearview Drive, Pittsford, NY 14534; 50¢, 5/\$2.00; irregular, offset and mimeo; undated, 34 pp. & 22-page supplement.

Tomorrow And . . . is another of the layout-conscious fanzines. Most of the fanzine is offset, very attractively, and a reprinted article and the lettercolumn are mimeographed, for economic reasons. The first thing I noticed while glancing through the issue was the artwork. There's a lot of it, and a lot of variety in the styles. Dan Steffan is present with an incredible 17 illustrations, most of them in his distinctive cartoon style, but with some serious illustrations for a *Clockwork Orange* review, two covers and a comic strip. If there is anyone in fandom who is not acquainted with Dan's delightful work, they should see this issue of *TA*.

The overall visual appearance of *TA* is quite good, though I'm a little tired of Jerry's sideways-on-the-page layout throughout the offset section. It was an interesting experiment the first time he tried it, but I don't see the advantage of using it on a regular basis. Besides, it's a cumbersome shape to read—my copy kept falling out of my hands, and was hard to read unless placed flat on a table.

The contents vary in style and quality. Among the good stuff is "Melbourne Diary," by John Foyster, an Australian fan. He rambles on several more-or-less related topics, among them the fact that Australia has recently switched to Daylight Savings Time:

" . . . My watch is still set on Eastern Standard Time, or God's Natural time, as I like to think of it. Of course, to be quite consistent I should use Eastern Standard as adjusted for Melbourne's geographical displacement from the 150 degree E meridian (which would then be Genuine God's Natural Time), but I am prepared to make a few concessions to my fellow citizens.

"But advancing my watch is a different matter. After all, if God really wanted us to move to this unnatural system he would have made the sun rise an hour earlier.

"Maybe when you get right down to it,

that's the problem. Maybe people don't mind getting up at 6:30 am if they can pretend it is 7:30 instead. One could achieve exactly the same result as that obtained by Daylight Savings Time merely by advancing all the day one hour—start work at 8 instead of 9, knock off at 4 instead of five—but this is too simple an approach. Governments decide they must kid the citizens along that everything is as before—rise at the same hour, work at the same hour, and so on."

There is also a good review of *A Clockwork Orange* by David Wise. Unfortunately, this issue of *TA* is very late—the review was written over a year ago, and by now most of what he has to say has been said, several times, in countless newspapers and magazines. And it is interesting to note that Kubrick's latest film has attracted almost as much attention in the fan press as his *2001* did several years ago, when almost every fanzine carried some discussion of it. And each film won the Dramatic Presentation Hugo in their respective years.

Bob Vardeman's column this issue is a humorous story about falling asleep in front of the television and dreaming about various fans taking the place of the tv personalities. Terry Carr did the same idea much better in *Warhoon* several years ago, but this treatment still has its moments—and how can I not like a satire in which I'm a character? Rosemary Ulliot has another one of her stories of the strange people she meets in the "real world" (as opposed to the "fannish world"). I find the series minor—her writing quality is not high enough to rescue the trivial subject matter—but many of Jerry's readers think this is Good Stuff; decide for yourself. Another Australian fanwriter, George Turner, talks about several books published as mainstream novels that handle sf themes well. Harry Warner writes an appreciation of Clifford Simak, after having met him for the first time at a convention.

One of the best items in the issue is an article in the supplement (reprinted from the excellent critical fanzine, *Science Fiction*

Commentary) by Bruce R. Gillespie, yet another good Australian fanwriter. Bruce talks about three novels by Philip K. Dick and draws some interesting conclusions about Dick's universe. This is a must-read article if you are at all interested in Phil Dick. The rest of the supplement consists of one of the best-edited lettercolumns I have seen recently.

This is probably the single best issue of *Tomorrow And . . .* to date, and it strikes a good balance between serious and fannish material. From a visual point of view, it's far and away the best thing Jerry has done. Fortunately, this time there is also a lot of good reading matter to go along with the graphics.

Rating . . . 7½

STARLING #24, Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main #1, Madison, Wisconsin 53703; 50¢, 3/\$1.00; quarterly, mimeo; March, 1973, 27 pp.

Starling has been around for a long time, as fanzines go—since 1964, in fact. In the past couple of years it has expanded its range of material, adding several new columnists and becoming a distinctive fanzine.

Starling is a fanzine concerned with popular culture in its various forms. Science fiction is discussed, but only as one of the many areas of popular culture Hank and Lesleigh are interested in. To give you some idea of the range of material in *Starling*, the past few issues have had material about Krazy Kat, John Wayne, science fiction on television, Georgette Heyer and underground comics. They also publish good fannish articles and some fine and funny cartoons.

The most recent issue doesn't have any strong lead articles, but it has a good range of interesting and diverse material, as always. Hank Luttrell leads off the issue with a rambling editorial, covering the events in his life for the several months since last issue. Joe Sanders continues his column, "With Malice Toward All," which deals

with science fiction books. Angus Taylor, in his column, talks about science fiction and mainstream and the difficulty in defining sf: "If you can point to a book and say, That's science fiction, then you do have a definition, whether you know it or not. If you want to discover what your definition is, then you've first got to rid yourself of the false notion that the book you just pointed to fits your definition. So don't look for the definition in the book. The definition is in your head." Those two columns comprise the science fiction section for this issue.

One thing I like about *Starling* is that they continue to expand the areas of pop culture discussed in the fanzine. This issue the new topic is the writing of Raymond Chandler, whose detective stories are currently enjoying a revival of interest in the paperback editions. Michael Carlson, in "Chandler's World," provides a good introduction to Chandler, concentrating on Phillip Marlowe, Chandler's most famous character. The article does a good job of showing how Chandler developed the character of Marlowe in his fiction.

Juanita Coulson talks about what the fifties were *really* like in this issue's installment of her "Dance to the Music." She discusses the current nostalgia for the era, and adds: "It was a very nervous time to be young. I don't mean hassles about hair or occasional hard hats or bloody noses. I mean total ostracism. Not just by the establishment or those never-never land elders of yours. I mean by your peers. Not that they might not sympathise. They just wouldn't do it out loud where you could hear it. Not if you got out of line. And an incredible number of things counted as being out of line. Including, in some circles, having anything whatsoever to do with blacks. Or music that to a lot of ears sounded suspiciously black."

There's a good lettercolumn, filled with disagreement about an article in the previous issue concerning John Wayne, as well as various people remembering old sf television series. The highlight of the art is a lovely

James Shull cover, and a series of takeoffs on various fan cartoonists' styles by Jay Kinney.

Rating... 7

Other Fanzines:

CIPHER #7, Chris Couch, Route 2, Box 889, No. 1 Cymry Lane, Arnold, Mo. 63010; 35 , 3/\$1.00; irregular, mimeo; February, 1973, 30 pp.

A good fannish fanzine. Rating... 6½

NOSFAN #23, NOSEA, PO Box 8087, New Orleans, La. 70182; 25; irregular, mimeo; January, 1973, 31 pp.

Publication of the New Orleans Science Fiction Association. Mostly reviews. Rating... 4

MUNDAC #2, Rick Stooker, 1205 Logan St., Alton, Ill. 62002; no price; irregular, mimeo; February, 1973, 12 pp.

A personalzine with a lettercolumn. Rating... 6

THE ANYTHING THING #5, Frank Balazs & Matthew Schneck, 19 High St., Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520; 40¢ or 5 8¢ stamps; quarterly, mimeo & xerox (?); February, 1973, 40 pp.

Rating... 4

MAYBE #24 & 24, Irvin Koch, c/o 835 Chattanooga Bank Building, Chattanooga, Tenn. 37402; 50¢; "6 or 7 times per year," mimeo & offset; undated, 29 & 26 pp.

He prints everything that comes in (news and letters), but in no particular order. Extremely cluttered and out of control. Rating... 3

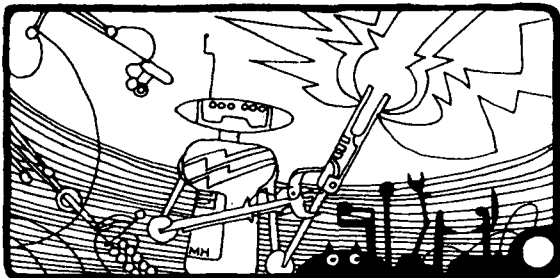
OSFIC QUARTERLY #2 & 3, John Douglas, 414 Jarvis St., Apt. 36, Toronto, M4Y 2G6; 50¢; quarterly, offset; undated, 28 & 26 pp.

Publication of the Ontario Science Fiction Club. Rating... 5

GRAPHIC ART REVIEW #1, Donald Markenstein, 2425 Nashville Ave., New Orleans, La. 70115; 35¢; monthly, mimeo; May, 1973, unnumbered pp.

"The only magazine devoted to review and criticism of current comic books." Of course it also says, "Volume 1, Number 1, Whole (cont. on page 127)

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to *Or So You Say*, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

We were forced last issue by space requirements to cut back drastically on our letter column. The letters which follow were all set in type for that column and are published here with necessary updating only in my editorial replies. Next issue we'll try to get caught up on more recent letters.—TW

Mr. White:

I hope you'll excuse the following bit of ancient history. I think it backs up the point I hope to make.

My experience with science fiction began with the Saturday morning space operas of the early 50's. It extended through some perfectly horrible movies; and some very good ones, too. I read some excellent "juvenile" SF by Norton and Heinlein and a few pot-boilers that the fine folk at John C. Winston Company dreamed up on a dull Saturday afternoon and blamed on Ivar Jorgenson. I enjoyed many an issue of *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* as edited by Cele Goldsmith. Some other magazines weren't so enjoyable. Today I'll make time so that I can re-read a big hunk of *Cities In Flight*. I'll also admit that every few months I'll kill a lunch hour taking in a Captain Future reprint.

What all of the above, twenty-one or more years of "above," leads up to is a very nice

feeling about science fiction as a whole. It doesn't leave too great a feeling toward science fiction fandom as a way of creating holes.

For as long as I've been exposed to *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* as you've edited them, I've been impressed by your objectivity. This being the case, the picture that comes through of fandom as it currently exists is very disturbing.

In its current form, -fandom may have been necessary during the 30's and 40's. But as the public has come to accept science fiction on its own terms, rather than in terms of mainstream fiction, this defensive clanishness has become unnecessary. What seems to be left is a series of mammoth gatherings that few people want to pay for and even fewer people want to administrate. All the "true believers" get together and the Intergalactic Elmer Fudd's (nee Boutillier) are shocked by the naked people while other folk are busy unloading first editions.

I can see a lot more value in the type of gathering Ivor Rogers talks about in his letter. (I was at Drake from '67 to '69 and can't say that I ever heard of such goings on.) At the same time I'm afraid of them for fear that such sincere scholarly conferences may one day arrive at a definition of science fiction. When that comes about so do limitations regarding what can be acceptable and what can not be acceptable.

It may be impossible to compare the voyages of the starship Enterprise with those

of Van Vogt's Beagle but I'd like to view them as both being part of the same vaguely defined whole; that because of that vague, fluid definition there will always be room for comparison and growth on science fiction's own terms.

MARTIN M. DALLARD
112 E. Green, #1
Champaign, Ill., 61820

No, fandom is not "necessary" any more—but then, it never was! Fandom is a social group, and as such is its own justification. Some aspects are disturbing to some of us—and these have gotten perhaps more than their fair share of attention here recently—but they are not the whole. I like to think that other more pleasant aspects are given equal attention in The Clubhouse, and I hope you aren't ignoring these. In any case, those aspects of the sf community which are visible here are only the tip of the iceberg.

—TW

Dear Ted;

Due to Mr. Thomas F. Monteleone's book review of Arthur C. Clarke's 72 novel, *The Wind from the Sun*, with the review appearing in the November 72 issue of AMAZING, caused me to enclose a letter to your magazine in order to express my resentment of review tactics, which the said named individual had used. The letter then appeared in your March issue, along with a reply from the reviewer, and, as a result, comes my second letter on the subject.

To look back for a second to November of 72, it was stated in the review that, "The book is less than 200 pages, which illustrates the fact that Clarke does not write much fiction anymore." So, from this comes the side idea that due to the shortness of the novel, we are to believe that Clarke may be getting tired of being a science fiction writer, giving up his respect for the field, as well as communicating with us. Mixed with other "snide comments, implications and abuse", by the reviewer, we are lead to wonder about Clarke's ethics. Therefore, let us now set the record straight!

In 1968, we had all taken serious notice of the 2001 novel and, in 1969, many of us had heard Clarke speak on TV, expressing his ideas and theories about 'the realization of science fiction', as a result of the Apollo 11 lunar landing. At this time, Clarke had been in big demand throughout the world, and he tried hard to meet those demands—all in the name and honor of his profession; the art of science fiction. (As he stated in his *other* 1972 book, to be named shortly and which Mr. T. F. Monteleone must have neglected reading, Clarke states that he had so many offers for television interviews that he had to turn many of them down because of the large demand made upon him and his health.) And, after coming off the tour, followed by a well deserved rest, he not only wrote *The Wind from the Sun*, for 1972, but first wrote *The Lost Worlds of 2001*. (A total of 440 pages. Or, in my way of counting, 660 pages of typed material.) Thus . . . "Arthur C. still is a Grand-master, Snow-white!"

Now! I personally found *The Lost Worlds of 2001* to be darn good reading, interesting and a sequel of expanded ideas along the 2001 line. Sort of like reading the beginning at the end of a great author's works. Yet this second novel of the 2001 line has a different approach, stronger ideas and clearer thoughts of alien relationships to Man, which can easily cause the novel to stand alone, as an entirely new train of 'Clarke' thoughts on the subject. All-in-all, *The Lost Worlds of 2001* clearly displays what it takes to keep a Grand-master great!

As Monteleone clearly pointed out to me, "What you have overlooked, or failed to realize, is that literature (like all art) is a continually renewing process." In the March issue, he also goes on to clarify, "Artists cannot allow themselves to rest on past accomplishments if they want to be taken seriously." He then makes his point by stating, "Clarke is no different than anyone else; he must continually create new works which must stand alone, on their own intrinsic merit, and be evaluated as such."

Of course, this is not true. And, it is clear that Mr. T.F. Monteleone sadly lacks the understanding and knowledge of the strategic values of science fiction writing, and the inter-play that is involved in building a writer's own character in the field. He also does not understand the real ethics of a professional writer to communicate to the reader, thoughts of a moral code of ethics and the consent given to the writer by way of the 'printed word'. (Like a fellow worker stated, who read T.F.'s works in the March issue, "If you can't write well—write blaspheme!") And, as my own thought—it shows! It shows that T.F.'s hostilities, if guided properly, could help say something in proper ethics to all of mankind—but, now, is too early—too soon—too blasphemous!

As for kicking at a writer about his bad writing—take a look at Jack London! He made his own rules. In fact, when he tried to better himself by attending an English writing class, to improve his works, the strong regimentation of the sentence structure made him feel so upset that he got up and walked out.

Now, if it was meant that bad writing in the Heinlein controversy means an overabundance of padded filler in extending the story plot for length—I'll agree! Yes! Both, *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *I Will Fear No Evil*, have their middles too caked with it! But, if 'bad writing' means thought-wise—*no!* The final point and conclusions, through a buildup of priming thoughts are there! The story tempo is there! (Though somewhat sluggish in the middle.) And, his characters play out a role that justifies the end and title of the story!

As for the topic of what other reviewers are now doing to supplement their income as reviewers, being also writers and a reviewer of other writers—is a question onto itself! One that raises a darn good question—can one writer be objective enough so to do another writer justice? A reviewer who is equal to, or, lesser than the writer that the reviewer is covering, the chance of true objectivity is small to nil. A reviewer who is

greater than that writer, the chance is better. But, a reviewer, who is a professional reviewer only, the chances are best. So, it can not be overlooked that equal competition, in the same area, does cause individuals to become a little less objective towards each other. (This was many a college teachers explanation of their logic. Logic which I have greatly observed for truth and the area of this truth does standup under fire. . . even though it is a form of generalized logic!)

Still on the subject of reviewers, and the magazines that were noted in the March issue, on this subject, I wonder how many of them would say the same thing openly before a camera? I find the best reviews, actually, coming across the 'book' tube, in the large circulation newspapers, magazines with a large circulation and seeing the movie (of the book) first, plus (and all too often) I will pick up a book on my instincts of its topic coverage. (Some day I'll have to stop that! With over 800 paperbacks and hardbacks scattered around the shelving about my room, the walls of Jerico may hit home!)

So, gradually coming to a close, if anyone is interested in a good book—try *Alpha* by Charles Eric Maine, a Ballantine paperback for \$1.25. The story of the second coming of MANKind, to a world of all women. (Rated: R) Well written and down to earth, in a controversial topic sense. A must for any woman-libber! And, a real must for a hung-up male! In short, it's human science fiction at its best!

STANLEY E. SCHRIEFER
305 Hammes Avenue
Joliet, Illinois, 60436

Your ignorance betrays you more than once in this letter. Had you even read Monteleone's review with any care, you would have realized that The Wind From the Sun is not a newly written novel at all. (The review's first sentence reads, "This is an anthology of Clarke's short stories which were written in the 60's.") In his reply to your letter in the March issue, Monteleone stated, "I strongly suspect that you have not read Clarke's

book." *This is quite obviously true. Under the circumstances, the rest of your letter is irrelevant.*—TW

Gentlemen:

May I comment on the controversy between Stanley Schriefer (writer) and Thomas Monteleone (critic)?

All of you miss a point. The writer—whether he admits it or not—is expressing his personal opinions when he writes fiction. The critic—whether he admits it or not—is expressing his opinions of the writer's opinions when he writes his little columns. The editor, in turn, sits at God's Right Hand in deciding whose opinions are to be expressed and whose aren't. And, of course, the publisher is God Himself, when he picks the editor.

No matter how thin or which way I cut it, I keep coming back to the conclusion that every single publishing house in existence today is basically a propaganda medium through which the owners try to mold and direct public opinion and the political and economic life of the nation. Why else would so many giant corporations fight tooth and toenail to keep the right to own and use these publishing houses at a staggering financial loss, with an overall tax writeoff to balance off? *[Have you seen any financial statements from any of these giant-corporation-owned publishing houses? I doubt it.*—TW]

Most of the people I know buy fiction for one purpose only—to learn the current propaganda "line" of the owners. In this is a great deal of profitable information for little joes like me, who like to pick up political or economic points of view now and then or—in cases like mine—who may be the victims of oppressive practices by the powers that be, and must constantly search for weak spots where they can hurt their enemies bad enough to make it unprofitable to oppress.

The rest of the world buys your stuff for entertainment only, and therein lies the second point of this letter:

We all know that writer-critic fights are pure fraud—a put-on for the 1% who believe

this hogwash. However, we buy to study and marvel at the far-out rationalizations that these characters all get into to make their points. It is amazing the number of propaganda tricks one can pick up from these things. The trouble is that when these things degenerate into personal hate-sessions—as Schriefer and Monteleone have—they lose their amusement value and people walk away. That, in turn, lowers circulation slightly and in so doing lowers the effectiveness of the mag as a propaganda outlet.

May I suggest you pry these two off their hate-kick and shove them back onto the normal rationalization mode?

EUGENE AUSTIN

17 Lee Ave., Apt. B
Clayton, Mo.

Your paranoid world-view doesn't match up with most of my experiences; this letter column exists for the exchange of opinions and occasionally insults. Our fiction exists to entertain. We do not regard this magazine as a propaganda vehicle—there is no "line" that I am aware of which would link all the contributions of our authors—and under the circumstances I am not at all worried about 'lowering the effectiveness of the mag as a propaganda outlet.' On the other hand, if you wish to continue contributing your own thoughts to these pages, I suggest you follow the simple requirements outlined at the head of this column, so that I need not again retype your letter for the typesetter.

—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Right on! Your reply to Lester Boutillier's letter in the March issue of AMAZING was beautifully stated. I find his attitudes towards ESP laughable. How can a phenomena not yet completely explained or understood be considered "immoral"? Does Mr. Boutillier believe that anyone having ESP is without morals? In league with Satan? Indeed, Mr. Boutillier's views are Victorian and very much biased.

Also I must defend Mr. Monteleone's reply to reader Schriefer's letter. I agree that

critics shouldn't be considered gods but neither should writers. Both should be open to constructive criticism. I agree with you, Mr. White, and with Mr. Monteleone, as far as Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil* goes. I found it was a great disappointment and I dropped the book halfway through. The idea was good but Mr. Heinlein just couldn't bring it off. But that doesn't mean I'll never read Heinlein again. I will. If nothing else, Mr. Schriefer failed to show respect to Mr. Monteleone. "Monty" was in very poor taste and Mr. Schriefer lets his ignorance show when he stoops that low to win a point. In this case I must side with Mr. Thomas F. Monteleone. Although I bought the Clarke book *The Wind from the Sun* and I intend to decide for myself, I still believe that Mr. Monteleone was right.

RAYMOND J. BOWIE JR.
31 Everett Avenue
Somerville, Mass. 02145

Dear Mr. White:

Just a few comments on Ivor Rogers' letter in your March editorial. I agree with Mr. Rogers that an international science fiction organization should be formed to coordinate nation-wide regional conventions and make policy decisions affecting future World Science Fiction Conventions. Although I have never attended a Worldcon (my husband and I plan to attend Torcon 2), reforms must be made if a convention of this size (over 2500 attended LACon!) is to survive in the years to come. Therefore, I would like to offer the following suggestions for reform:

1. A committee of authors, prozine editors, and fanzine editors should be set up to coordinate Worldcon reform.

2. Those readers and fans who have had published letters and articles about science fiction in newspapers, prozines, and fanzines should be given *first* consideration of *attending* Worldcon memberships.

3. All remaining *attending* memberships should be on a first come first serve basis, with a deadline date terminating application for membership.

4. All readers and fans may vote for the "Hugo" awards by paying the supporting membership fee, but *only* those who have a special membership card may be admitted at the convention.

5. The above mentioned Worldcon committee should take a poll with the aid of prozine and fanzine editors to determine a reasonable figure that would be the cut off point for *attending* memberships.

I realize that the reforms outlined above may be time consuming for those involved (time can be saved on some procedures, such as requiring submission of copies of letters and articles with application for attending memberships), but something must be done if a convention the size of The World Science Fiction Convention is to be a meaningful experience for those involved. I welcome any criticism of the above suggestions, and look forward to meeting many of you at Torcon 2.

SANDRA DODD
Route 1 Box 396
Charlotte Court House,
Virginia 23923

Dear Mr. White:

The March issue of AMAZING contained an article entitled "Agony in the Garden" by Thomas Monteleone.

We have had doubting Thomas. Now we have despairing Thomas. The main character of Thomas' story is Jesus Christ. But not really! The main character is Thomas Monteleone's despair with the insensitivity of human beings and the feeling that Jesus Christ, "the myth," cannot cope with it all.

I do heartily agree with despairing Thomas that human beings constantly fail at sensitivity and love; often wrecking the greatest dreams and ignoring each other in the mechanical jungle that is now evolving. Man seems bent upon forgetting the great human values of love and justice, peace and hope, life and joy.

But I do not share his conviction that Jesus Christ cannot cope with it—or as he put it, "Man evolved, but Christ could not

change with him."

His science fiction is from the past. His story reverses the evolutionary process. Except for the mechanical conveniences of some future eon, all progress is backward. His human beings of tomorrow have no personalities but have receded into a state of insensitive protoplasm. For some strange reason, Christ, the man of the future, cannot cope with the past. Absurd! Christ can certainly cope with the past even if it does come wrapped in "slidewalks" and "Starships." This is a story of man's descent, not man's ascent; of man's past, not of man's future.

Is man going in the wrong direction? Perhaps he is. But if he is—then Jesus Christ is more needed than ever before. Christ is not out of the past. Christ is from the future. No great genius is ever left behind. No great love is ever inflexible. No great truth is ever out of date. No great person is ever myth. Christ who saved the old world can certainly save the brave new world. And that is more amazing than science fiction.

ROGER B. KRONMANN
1506 Church Lane
Glen Burnie, Md. 21061

Dear Ted,

While standing around the drug store waiting for a prescription to be filled, and thumbing through the skin-mags, I came across a lone copy of the January issue of AMAZING. It was the only SF magazine in evidence. I was amazed. AMAZING is still being published?" I asked myself in amazement. The cover blurb said "First in Science Fiction Since 1926." The AMAZING," I cried out! (I once had a copy of a 1927 issue, back in 1957-1960 era of fandom when I was a TruFan). So I leafed through it. Ted White, editor! Why, I remember when he was a gross neofan! (such as myself). My Amazement soared to new heights! A feature by Bob Shaw and Walt Willis, who were BNF's in "my time"! *The Enchanted Duplicator!!!!* MiGod, I still have a copy of that fan publication, in a box in the garage, along with a few other mouldy relics of the time. I rushed home to look it up.

Sure enough, I still have it. Also, *The Harp Stateside* and a few odd copies of the rag I published at the time, *Vampire*.

So I thought I would write a quick note and tell you of my delight in discovering AMAZING again. And to wish you a continued success. I also followed every issue of Robert Lowndes' *Magazine of Horror*, etc., until I could no longer find them on the stands. Did he run out of old horror stories to reprint? I miss them.

A comment to Laurence Dielle—Variety is the spice of life and SF especially, dummy. If all you want is fiction, go to the library.

STONY B. BARNES

662 Balfour Dr.

San Jose, Calif. 95111

It's nice to hear from you again after all these years, Stony. I still remember "Stony Brook" Barnes as one of the original Cry letterhacks, of some fifteen years ago. The publisher of Lowndes' magazines discontinued them several years ago, to the considerable disappointment of those of us who had managed to ferret them out on the newsstands.—TW

Dear Ted,

IN RE: The HP Letterhack Award.

After long and hard deliberation I have finally decided to give Cy Chauvin the HP Letterhack Award for his efforts during 1972. This was done because I follow Buck Coulson's dictum that fan awards should be passed around and shared. Jerry Lapidus already has the award for 1971; he was the only close competition. Dave Hulvey, Darrell Schweitzer, and other possible contenders are still liable for their efforts this year. Lapidus and Chauvin are not. They may continue to distinguish themselves with the clear knowledge that though they may earn the respect and admiration of prozine readers everywhere, they cannot win the HP Letterhack Award again as long as I am the sole selection committee and judge.

That brings up some questions: Should there be an award for the best prozine letterhack of the year? What should its name

be? (HP Letterhack is just a conveniently catchy and fannish name. Some people might consider it a disservice to HP Lovecraft, even though he distinguished himself as the most likely champion letter writer of his time. Letterhack is a label with some negative connotations. Perhaps "Prozine Critic" of the Year would be more appro-

priate—as long as it was made perfectly clear that it meant critic of prozines and not book reviewer. Semantic traps, semantic traps!)

JOHN ROBINSON
1—101st Street
Troy, NY 12180

The Sun-Hunters (cont. from page 49) short. He knew now. He knelt, and began raking anxiously and carefully through the flaming pile in front of him, his star, his sun. He drew its rebellious core tenderly toward him. Things from outside were trying to burst in on him—he could dimly see his mother's open, screaming mouth, and smell an unfamiliar stench of burning flesh; but

there were more important things to think of.

There must be some way in which he could cure this diseased sun for the poor little mannikins whose lives were dependent on its continued burning. There must be something he could do. After all, He was omnipotent, wasn't He?

—DAPHNE CASTELL

The Club House (cont. from page 120) #1, Collector's edition." Rating... 4
GODLESS #3, Sp4 Bruce D. Arthurs, 527-98-3103, 57th Trans Co, Fort Lee, Va. 23801; 40¢; irregular, offset; Spring, 1973, 19 pp.

Rating... 3½

GADGET-MAN'S GRAB BAG #1, Dan and Carol Eiler, 901 Silver Meadows Blvd., Apt. 104, Kent, Oh. 44240; 45¢; bi-monthly, offset; February, 1973, 20 pp.

Rating... 3

NO #13, Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater

Bld., Minneapolis, Minn. 55417; 25¢; irregular, mimeo; March, 1973, 30 pp.

Rating... 4

WONDER GAB #5, Lester Boutillier, 2726 Castiglione St., New Orleans, La. 70119; no price listed; bi-weekly, xerox; March 31, 1973, 5 pp.

Rating... 2

Send fanzines for review to Ed Smith, 1315 Lexington Ave., Charlotte, N.C., 28203.

—ED SMITH

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For that reason, then, I have decided to publish the foreword here—despite its similarity at least in broad outline to the editorial I published here in May, 1971, in our 45th Anniversary Issue. Here it is:

A FOREWORD by Ted White

Two years ago my predecessor at *Amazing Stories*, Joseph Ross, put together a collection of stories he called *Best of Amazing*. It represented his tastes as an editor and as an enthusiast of the 'old style' stories of the antediluvian period of science fiction (all but three stories dated from before 1940, and one went back to an original appearance in 1919!)—but modern science fiction was conspicuously absent.

Amazing Stories, of course, spans all the eras. It was the first science fiction magazine ever published, and in its early years virtually set the standards by which sf was judged. But 1926 is a long time ago, and somewhere along the line the reins slackened and others became the standard-bearers. This is the way of all things, alas, but although *Amazing Stories* has known its doldrum times, it has survived them all, and this book is intended to celebrate a few of her victories; not to cry out her defeats.

Because Joseph Ross dealt fairly and well with the periods when *Amazing* was edited by Hugo Gernsback (her founder) and T. O'Connor Sloan—and because, regrettably, Raymond A. Palmer, her third editor, left us little to remember but the occult hysteria of the Shaver Mystery—I have chosen herein to concentrate upon the fecund periods of two later editors, Howard Browne and Cele Goldsmith.

Howard Browne inherited the editorship of a ragged-edged pulp magazine, still scarred by the feuds and follies of the period when Ray Palmer was printing Richard S. Shaver's garbled fantasies as 'gospel truth' and replacing the magazine's sf readers with a lunatic fringe who believed all that claptrap. Browne was a mystery-story writer (he wrote the three Paul Pine novels under the pseudonym of "John Evans") who had

gravitated into the Chicago stable of *Amazing* writers during the forties, and, when Palmer pulled stakes to become a publisher on his own, Browne stepped in to see what he could do to refurbish the magazine.

His first project was to turn *Amazing Stories* into a slick, 50¢ magazine, a complete publishing departure for the times. He began buying material for the new magazine, paying, it was rumored, fabulous prices for stories by all the top names in—and out of—the field. Unhappily, the Korean "Police Action" intruded just then, and the project was shelved. *Amazing* continued for another two years as a 25¢ ragged-edged pulp.

In 1952, *Amazing's* publishers experimented with a digest-sized quality-fiction magazine, *Fantastic*. It was a necessary response to the obviously forthcoming death of pulp magazines. And the experiment proved successful enough that with her April-May, 1953, issue, *Amazing Stories* followed suit. That first digest issue was a block-buster. Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, Murray Leinster, Theodore Sturgeon, Richard Matheson and H.L. Gold were all there. Unfortunately, so were Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, with something called "Mars Confidential!" It undercut the whole idea of a quality sf magazine.

The problem was that although Browne was an undeniably good editor, he just didn't happen to like science fiction that much. His first allegiance was the mystery story, and his casual contempt for the sf reader cropped up time and again with such "audience-broadening" stunts as the Lait-Mortimer piece (which, it was rumored, Browne had himself ghost-written). Lait and Mortimer were the authors of a series of books with such titles as *Hollywood Confidential*, *New York Confidential*, which pretended to muck-raking, but thrived on simple scandal. The notion that they could attract a broader audience to *Amazing* is not impossible to accept; the notion that it would be a superior, more sophisticated audience was absurd. In

any event, the "quality" *Amazing* lasted only three issues as such; then the use of interior color overlays was dropped, the pages were cut, more pages were put, and a thicker pulp paper was reverted to while the magazine's policies returned to the action-adventure mold of the pulp days. The grand experiment was over.

If that new, "quality" *Amazing* lasted only a short time, it did give us a rich legacy of stories, and one I've only lightly tapped for this volume.

Howard Browne was succeeded as editor by Paul Fairman, whose major contribution to the magazine was to put it on a pounds and yards system whereby a regular stable of authors turned in a set amount of wordage each month and received what amounted to a salary check in return. Some of those writers were gifted—a number have since distinguished themselves both within and outside the field—but the schedule was wearying and the Fairman era was for the most part marked by competent but undistinguished stories.

In 1958 Cele Goldsmith became *Amazing's* editor and things began looking up. Under no delusions about her own importance, Miss Goldsmith simply did what should have been done years earlier: she opened *Amazing's* pages to the stories she liked, irrespective of the author. And because she was honestly enthusiastic about science fiction, she made an honest sf magazine of *Amazing*.

I was just starting to break into sf writing in those days—I sold her a story in 1962—and I recall that *Amazing* was one of the magazines I most wanted to appear in; not the least of reasons being the way Cele reported within days on submissions. Cele was responsible for discovering Keith Laumer, Ursula K. LeGuin, Thomas Disch and Roger Zelazny, among others, and during her stay with the magazine you could find most of the Names in the field sharing her pages with these and other newcomers.

Unfortunately, times have not treated the sf magazines well; sales throughout the field

have fallen sharply in the last decade. And in 1965 Ziff-Davis, *Amazing's* publisher more than twenty-five years, decided to throw in the towel. The magazines were offered for sale.

When Ultimate, *Amazing's* present publisher, took over both *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, it was with the understanding that they would subsist on a diet of reprints until such a time as they became more financially stable. Many fans decried this as the final end for a once-proud magazine; only a few realized that she would be in her grave but for this expedient. Four years have passed, and, as *Amazing's* present editor, it has been my pleasure to see her return once more to a policy of new stories, to once more assume the place she once knew as the queen of the science fiction magazines.

In subsequent volumes I hope to bring you the best of the year past, but in this volume—a companion to Joseph Ross'—we are catching up on *Amazing's* forty-three years past. I hope you'll find the volumes to come equally rewarding.

—Ted White, 1969

BACK TO 1973: I remarked upon my unhappiness with *The Best from Amazing Stories* in the July issue of *FANTASTIC*, and warned that a similar fate might also have befallen *The Best from Fantastic*. I'm moderately pleased to report that in that regard I was mistaken. True, the cover is equally blah (a photograph of clouds in the sky, overlaid with type), but my foreword to that volume was published and the story introductions are set in italics which sets them off far better from the stories themselves. I doubt that my February protest to Manor Books produced these improvements—by then the book was undoubtedly already set in type—and I am going to assume for the nonce that the people at Manor Books are still developing their publishing procedures and improving at it as they progress. Thus the prognosis for future volumes in the series is somewhat brighter now, and I'll keep you posted on forthcoming developments.

—TED WHITE

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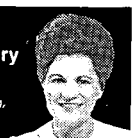
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